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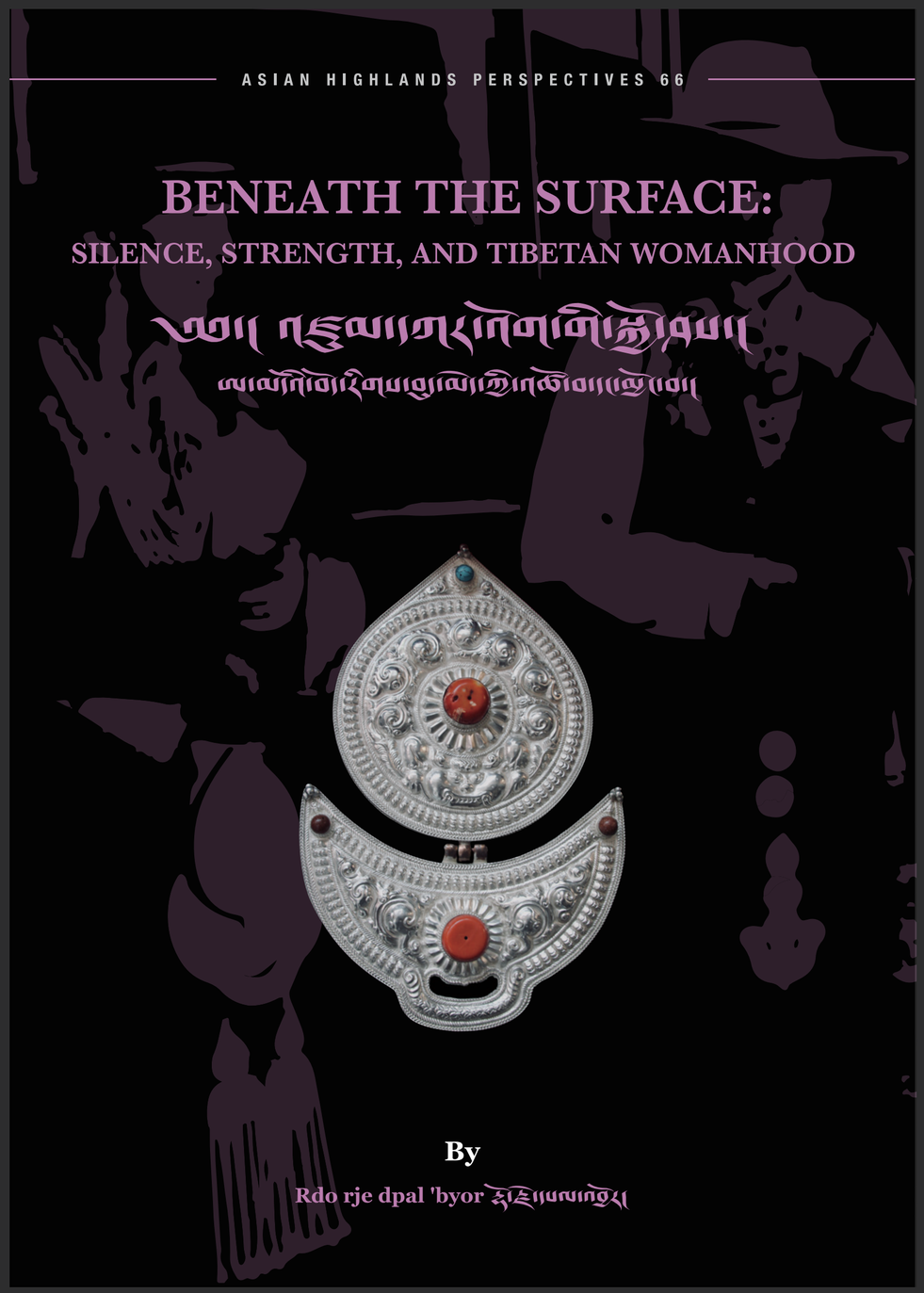
BENEATH THE SURFACE:
SILENCE, STRENGTH, AND TIBETAN WOMANHOOD

By
Rdo rje dpal 'byor

ASIAN HIGHLANDS PERSPECTIVES 66

BENEATH THE SURFACE:

SILENCE, STRENGTH, AND TIBETAN WOMANHOOD



By

Rdo rje dpal 'byor

In vast, rugged landscapes where Tibetan communities continue to uphold age-old traditions, intimate aspects of daily life remain largely undocumented. Tibetan Women's Lives offers a rare and deeply personal exploration of the experiences of Tibetan women from the 1970s to the present, focusing on fundamental yet often overlooked aspects of their lives – menstruation, childbirth, and menopause. Rich first-hand narratives unveil how women in these remote communities navigate menstrual hygiene, cultural beliefs, and social perceptions surrounding natural bodily processes. Weaving together individual testimonies and everyday life narratives, this book goes beyond to reveal broader realities of these women's existence - their struggles, resilience, and intricate balance between tradition and modernity. This book sheds light on Tibetan women's unique challenges, providing an insightful window into hidden worlds and a profound understanding of their lived experiences. This book is essential for those interested in gender studies, Tibetan culture, anthropology, and the intersection of tradition and change in one of the world's most isolated regions.

Huadan Zhaxi
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Tibetan women's voices are constrained in many aspects of life. Beneath the Surface: Silence, Strength, and Tibetan Womanhood by Rdo rje dpal 'byor offers an in-depth exploration of women's experiences, shedding light on topics often left unspoken, such as menstruation, pregnancy, childbirth, and menopause. This book breaks the silence surrounding these deeply personal aspects of Tibetan womanhood through intimate accounts. Bringing these hidden narratives to the forefront is a vital contribution to gender studies and Tibetan studies, enriching our understanding of the lived realities of Tibetan women. In addition, although Tibetan herders are often portrayed as "isolated" from the "modern" world, this book offers a fascinating account of ordinary Tibetan herders traveling internationally and interpreting what they see on their own terms.

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BENEATH THE SURFACE:
SILENCE, STRENGTH, AND TIBETAN WOMANHOOD

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Rdo rje dpal 'byor རྡོ་རྗེ་དཔལ་འབྱོར།

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ACCLAIM

Tibetan women's voices are constrained in many aspects of life. *Beneath the Surface: Silence, Strength, and Tibetan Womanhood* by Rdo rje dpal 'byor offers an in-depth exploration of women's experiences, shedding light on topics often left unspoken, such as menstruation, pregnancy, childbirth, and menopause. This book breaks the silence surrounding these deeply personal aspects of Tibetan womanhood through intimate accounts. Bringing these hidden narratives to the forefront is a vital contribution to gender studies and Tibetan studies, enriching our understanding of the lived realities of Tibetan women. In addition, although Tibetan herders are often portrayed as "isolated" from the "modern" world, this book offers a fascinating account of ordinary Tibetan herders traveling internationally and interpreting what they see on their own terms.

Sanggay Tashi, Sangs rgyas bkra shis སངས་རྒྱས་བཀྲ་ཤིས།, Anthropology
University of Colorado Boulder

In vast, rugged landscapes where Tibetan communities continue to uphold age-old traditions, intimate aspects of daily life remain largely undocumented. Tibetan Women's Lives offers a rare and deeply personal exploration of the experiences of Tibetan women from the 1970s to the present, focusing on fundamental yet often overlooked aspects of their lives – menstruation, childbirth, and menopause. Rich first-hand narratives unveil how women in these remote communities navigate menstrual hygiene, cultural beliefs, and social perceptions surrounding natural bodily processes. Weaving together individual testimonies and everyday life narratives, this book goes beyond to reveal broader realities of these women's existence - their struggles, resilience, and intricate balance between tradition and modernity. This book sheds light on Tibetan women's unique challenges, providing an insightful window into hidden worlds and a profound understanding of their lived experiences. This book is essential for those interested in gender studies, Tibetan culture, anthropology, and the intersection of tradition and change in one of the world's most isolated regions.

-Huadan Zhaxi, Dpal ldan bkra shis དཔལ་ལྡན་བཀྲ་ཤིས།
Humbolt-Universität zu Berlin

Rdo rje dpal 'byor's *Beneath the Surface* is a rich tapestry of culture, tradition, and womanhood in an intimate exploration of life in Bon skor Tibetan Community in Qinghai Province. Interviews, personal reflections, and vivid storytelling unveil deeply rooted cultural practices and evolving dynamics surrounding pregnancy, childbirth, menstruation, and menopause in a rural Tibetan area, ranging from sacred traditional Buddhist rituals to women's silent struggles with childbirth, menstruation, and the largely uncharted field of menopause. A chapter of the author's heartfelt homage to her grandmother's life, reflection on ornaments, and sense of heritage is also included. Importantly, challenges of marital conflict and women's health are depicted, weaving together personal and communal stories. Tibetan women's voices and hidden stories of Tibetan womanhood come alive, offering profound insights into their experiences. A vibrant travelogue documenting a trip across Thailand, Singapore, and Malaysia, enriched by local elders' perspectives as they encounter new cultures and cuisines, is included, as are evocative photo essays of religious activities, reciprocal labor relationships, and the communal spirit of bread-making, dumpling preparation, and wedding ceremonies, further complement the book. This poignant celebration of Tibetan women's resilience, strength, and evolving roles in a rapidly changing world offers readers a rare glimpse into the heart of Tibetan womanhood and tradition.

-Dbang 'dus sgrol ma དབང་འདུས་སྒྲོལ་མ། (Wendezhuoma 文德卓玛)

Amdo agro-pastoral community, childbirth, menstruation, menopause, a local elder's reflection on ornaments and life, a group of locals' (including the author) twelve-day travel in Southeast Asia, a short story exploring challenges local women face, a richly illustrated presentation of local religious life, and local bread-making and food displays. Women's views on life, family, and what it means to live, highlighting their authentic strengths, fears, struggles, and optimism when facing hardships and pain, provide intimate details of rural Tibetan women sharing their life experiences. *Beneath the Surface: Silence, Strength, and Tibetan Womanhood* is highly recommended.

-Wande Tsering, Ban de tshe ring བན་དེ་ཚེ་རིང་།
Massachusetts Institute of Technology

Beneath the Surface: Silence, Strength, and Tibetan Womanhood is Rdo rje dpal 'byor's compelling exploration of Tibetan women's lives in the author's home village, Bon skor (Wangshenke), in Mtsho lo (Hainan) Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, Qinghai Province, PR China. Combining evocative visuals with insightful storytelling, the book offers a rare glimpse into Tibetan womanhood through forty photographs, maps, and thoughtful reflections and research.

Organized across ten chapters, the book begins with a personal introduction from the author, providing a brief background of her village and an overview of the work. The narrative then unfolds through three in-depth research papers examining the reproductive health of village Tibetan women, exploring their beliefs and practices surrounding childbirth, menstruation, and menopause.

In addition to the research, the book includes reflections on the author's paternal grandmother, an account of her family's travel to Thailand, Singapore, and Malaysia, a story of her personal experiences, and two photo essays further complementing Tibetan womanhood, vividly and visually illustrating themes such as marital conflicts, health issues, religious practices, and the role of women in such village rituals as food preparation for special events, including New Year's celebrations and weddings. These authentic accounts capture the complexities of Tibetan women's lives in the village, highlighting tensions between tradition and modernity, gender roles, and challenges women face in navigating local religious, cultural, and economic pressures.

Alongside the research and personal narratives, the book features references, appendices with interview questions about menopause, weblinks to original images used throughout the book, and lists of non-English terms in Tibetan and Chinese. Through its combination of in-depth research, vivid life stories, and striking photographs, *Beneath the Surface* offers a nuanced portrayal of Tibetan women's lives, struggles, and triumphs while providing insight into broader dilemmas such as the contrast between men and women, tradition and modernity, and home and abroad.

This book is an excellent resource for anyone interested in Tibetan life focused on Tibetan womanhood in Qinghai, PR China.

-Tshe dbang rdo rje ཚེདབང་རྡོརྗེ། (Caixiangduojie 才项多杰)
Qinghai Normal University 青海师范大学

Rdo rje dpal 'byor's *Beneath the Surface* illuminates intimate experiences of Tibetan women in rural Bon skor Community, offering unprecedented insights into their experiences with childbirth, menstruation, and menopause. The author unveils previously undocumented narratives capturing rural Tibetan women's unique challenges and remarkable resilience through ethnographic research and sensitive storytelling. Drawing on extensive fieldwork and personal accounts, the book weaves individual stories and broader cultural analysis, challenging the conventional understanding of women's lives in traditional Tibetan society. This study contributes to gender studies, Tibetan anthropology, and our knowledge of women's experiences in indigenous communities.

-Lugyal Bum (Klu gryal 'bum ཀླུ་རྒྱལ་འབུམ), Northwestern University

Rdo rje dpal 'byor offers a rich tapestry of Tibetan life through vivid stories and insightful observations. From childbirth, menstruation, and menopause to the rhythms of religious practice and the artistry of bread-making, the book delves into the intimate and often unseen aspects of women's experiences in rural Tibetan communities. Readers are taken on a surprising journey as Amdo Tibetan herders venture abroad to Thailand, Singapore, and Malaysia, encountering new worlds far from the high Plateau, and a compelling short story reflects the dilemmas Tibetan women face. *Beneath the Surface: Silence, Strength, and Tibetan Womanhood* illuminates tradition's enduring strength amid the currents of change.

- Nyinggar Gyal, Snying dkar rgyal སྙིང་དཀར་རྒྱལ།
Qinghai Minzu University

Rdo rje dpal 'byor's extraordinary volume is a meandering river guiding us through the life journey of Tibetan women. Confronting the harsh reality of childbirth, this journey is marked by harshness rather than tenderness. Menstrual struggles include the silent humiliation of blood soaking into Tibetan robes, to fleeting relief of sanitary pads, only to face the awkwardness of wearing them without underwear. Scenes unfold like heavy scrolls, wordlessly testifying to urgent physical health challenges.

Another pain is the invisibility of menopause - a transformative life stage often shrouded in neglect and ignorance, an ignored corner in their world.

Shockingly, some women first set foot in county towns in their thirties, an experience that spans geography and kindles a spiritual and cognitive awakening.

Modernity's tumultuous tides pierce through millennia of shadow, offering unprecedented physical and mental liberation. Even those who never entered a school now fly to Thailand, Malaysia, and Singapore, broadening horizons and awakening long-cloistered minds.

Beneath this glitter lies profound cultural fission and identity struggle. As they engage with the outside world, they realize their familiar cultural soil is shifting, with once-immovable traditions now appearing fragile from external exposure. Their culture, they mourn, resembles an aging elder, small and vulnerable in the roaring current of modernization, a star on the verge of being forgotten.

Beneath the Surface: Silence, Strength, and Tibetan Womanhood is more than a compassionate gaze into Tibetan women's physical and health plight; it is a searing reflection on struggle, awakening, and oblivion. It reveals how, amid epochal changes, unsung lives navigate contradictions and chart complex, heartrending maps of the soul while tenuously clinging to tradition and yielding to foreign allure.

-Rigdrol Jikar, Rig grol རིག་གྲོལ (Rou Zhou 肉卓)
Qinghai Normal University

The daily lives of ordinary women in a rural Tibetan area on the Tibetan Plateau are vividly documented through direct personal accounts. Menstruation, childbirth, and menopause are explored via experiences of those who endured harsh times when trousers and underwear were scarce or unavailable, let alone modern feminine hygiene products. Cultural and religious influences on these physical phenomena offer unique ethnographic insights. Socio-economic development has enhanced people's living standards, including women's social status and their knowledge of personal hygiene, and has brought about cultural changes in lifestyle. In chronicling her experience of an international tour with a group of mostly elderly Tibetans, who had rarely ever left their rural hometowns, the author allows readers to sense the successive shocks they experienced, such as encountering seafood, crocodile meat, and transgender performance. Based on real-life personal accounts supported by numerous photos, the author presents a comprehensive view of a community in transition. This is a valuable contribution for readers interested in Tibetan culture and lifestyle.

-Kelsang Norbu, Gesang Norbu, Skal bzang nor bu སྐལ་བཟང་ནོར་བུ།

Beneath the Surface: Silence, Strength, and Tibetan Womanhood offers deeply personal narratives in a compelling exploration of the lives of Tibetan women spanning three generations in rural Bon skor Community, delving into the realities of childbirth, menstruation, and silent struggles endured by women within a society shaped by poverty, tradition, and entrenched misogyny.

As modernization and compulsory education reshape Tibetan womanhood, the stark contrast between home births and hospital deliveries and traditional menstrual and modern hygienic practices testify to the power of progress. Yet, for some, like A sgrol, whose tragic life epitomizes suffering and resistance, the weight of tradition remains unyielding. Her story, though extreme, serves as a powerful symbol of the silent resilience of women on the Tibetan Plateau.

Beyond struggles of womanhood, Rdo rje dpal 'byor's *Beneath the Surface* offers a rich tapestry of village life, documenting religious rituals, culinary traditions, and the transformative experience of international travel. From Qinghai's gray winters to Thailand's lush summers, the cultural shock of rural Tibetans

encountering modern metropolises like Bangkok and Singapore is captured, revealing a journey resembling time travel between two worlds.

Vivid illustrations and photographs further enhance this poignant, eye-opening account of change, endurance, and the evolving identity of Tibetan women in a rapidly shifting world.

-Gengqiu Gelai, Konchok Gelek,
Dkon mchog dge legs དཀོན་མཆོག་དགེ་ལེགས།

Rdo rje dpal 'byor, a Tibetan scholar from Guinan County, Hainan Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, Qinghai Province, China, has lifted a veil to the world by revealing personal experiences of local Tibetan women's menstruation, menstrual cramps, childbirth, and menopause before 2000. These women believed menstruation was a shameful, insulting thing. Tibetan women weren't allowed to go to monasteries, family shrines, and mountaintops to worship *lab rtse* during menstruation because they considered it polluting and feared angering Buddhas and deities, which might bring disaster. In that era, the lack of sanitary pads and underwear compared with women today caused inconvenience and pain during menstrual periods.

The author also describes several local Tibetan herders' experiences touring Thailand, Singapore, and Malaysia. They set out from an icy Qinghai-Tibet Plateau winter and arrived where seasons were like spring, oceans were boundless, tall buildings lined the cities, and people of various skin colors spoke diverse languages and ate different food. They better understood foreign cultures fundamentally different from their home community, a starting point in hoping more Tibetan herders will experience global travel.

The author's major project is about the lives of Tibetan women, especially their menstrual culture, which has rarely been written about or published by Tibetan women.

-Limusishiden (Li Dechun 李得春)

DEDICATION

o my parents and brother, whose love and unwavering support have been my foundation, and to my daughter, for always being my light, even when I am away.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

want to express my heartfelt thanks to the women of my community for their support and openness in sharing their personal experiences. I am also grateful for several editors' helpful comments and feedback.

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PREFACE

Beneath the Surface by Rdo rje dpal 'byor is a remarkable exploration of Tibetan women's lives in a pastoral-patriarchal society, offering nuanced and insightful perspectives on women's experiences with menstruation, pregnancy, and menopause intertwined with religious beliefs, societal structures, and evolving cultural practices. Written by a female author, this book ventures into rarely discussed territories, creating a space for stories and voices often silenced and overlooked. The author's careful examination of how physical changes throughout a woman's life from menarche to menopause are influenced by and, in turn, influence the religious and social behaviors women follow is compelling and enlightening.

Rdo rje dpal 'byor goes beyond academic analysis in documenting personal narratives. In-depth interviews with women born between the 1940s and the 1990s paint a vivid picture of Tibetan women's experiences across different generations. These women share their life stories, recounting their experiences of menstruation, pregnancy, and menopause, revealing how their physical and emotional journeys have been shaped by the ever-changing social, material, and religious landscape around them. From rural Tibetan communities to broader cultural shifts that have taken place in recent decades, a window opens into the transformation of traditions and beliefs surrounding womanhood.

One of the many contributions *Beneath the Surface* offers is its examination of the concept of being a woman. Her physical traits and accumulated experiences are not a static reality but evolve with time. As society changes, so do the roles and perceptions of women. This idea is powerfully demonstrated through generational shifts that Rdo rje dpal 'byor provides, illuminating how women's experiences with menstruation, fertility, and aging are deeply intertwined with societal evolution. Interviews shed light on rural Tibetan women's physical transformations and shifting cultural and religious expectations they faced over the decades.

More than reflections on women's biological milestones, this book is a testament to how these milestones have been understood

and experienced. Capturing rural Tibetan women's voices and documenting their lived realities, *Beneath the Surface* reveals the complexities of how women's bodies, identities, and social roles have evolved, providing rich, detailed accounts of their experiences in a transforming world.

Beneath the Surface is an essential read for those interested in the intersection of culture, religion, and gender. It provides a profound understanding of how women's lives are shaped by and, in turn, shape the cultural and social forces around them. Beyond a historical record, this contribution is an invitation to understand the dynamic nature of womanhood and appreciate women's resilience and adaptability through the changing tides of time. The accounts within these pages will inform and resonate deeply with readers, offering valuable insights into the complex and ever-evolving journey of being a woman. Highly recommended for readers of social history, gender studies, cultural anthropology, and those with a particular interest in Tibetan traditional culture and social evolution, *Beneath the Surface* will stay with you long after you turn the final page.

-Brug mo skyid འབྲུག་མོ་སྐྱིད། (Zhoumaoji 周毛吉),
International Institute of Social Studies, Erasmus University Rotterdam; Qinghai Normal University.

INTRODUCTION

I share a deep bond with where I was born and raised, its people, landscape, environment, animals, and the daily activities that shaped our lives - an agro-pastoral Tibetan community nestled in a valley surrounded by high and lower mountains. I spent my childhood at the farming site with my parents while my paternal grandparents cared for our livestock in the herding area.

Households were scattered at the foot of a range of steep ravines and barren mountains that created conditions for flooding. Heavy rainstorms, accompanied by rumbling thunder, were often a nightmare for my mother, who had endured many terrifying experiences during such storms. I vividly picture and hear my mother, always cautious and alert, beseeching the deities for protection until the storm subsided. She woke us when a storm grew severe, urging us to flee to higher ground.

A flood sweeping away our family's adobe house is an unforgettable memory. My cousin and I each held one of my grandmother's hands as we helplessly watched as the relentless muddy waters swept away our chairs, desks, clothes, and belongings. My mother, frantic and anxious, searched for my missing brother. The flood's roar drowned out her calls. It wasn't until later that she was relieved to learn my father had found my brother in a truck parked in the outer yard of our family house. We sheltered at a neighbor's house until the situation calmed.

Rocky Mountains loomed above, providing a harsh backdrop to the lives of the people below. Outsiders from more fertile landscapes teased us about the desert-like conditions of our homeland. However, as a local saying goes, *Rang yul gad pa yin rung skyid* 'One's homeland is the best, even if it's on a cliff'.

My childhood was spent in a spacious environment close to nature with fresh air and a blue sky, unlike today's children's worlds, which are increasingly spent indoors with electronic gadgets. Children played energetically, their laughter echoing across open spaces. Rolling down sandy mountains, running through fields of

yellow-flowered canola, and riding calves are cherished parts of my joyful, exciting childhood.

I am fortunate to have family members who have always supported my education. Pleasant moments were interspersed with unpleasant and distressing ones during my years of formal schooling. I was filled with curiosity and wonder as an innocent child just beginning formal schooling. Little did I realize the official school system would be far different from the one I had imagined. It was full of rules, discipline, and expectations that I was unprepared for. I endured abuse from older students and teachers fixated on exam results, neglecting our actual learning needs. The constant fear and physical punishment we faced crushed my early curiosity and enthusiasm for learning, and similarly affected many of my peers.

Despite setbacks in my schooling experiences, I later had the opportunity to improve my English under the guidance of a native English speaker, for which I have always been honored and grateful. His immeasurable assistance, patience, and kindness are a precious experience for me. Unlike the textbooks I once recited for exams, reading books such as *Veiled Sentiments* by Lila Abu-Lughod, *Celestial Bodies* by Jokha Alharthi, and Yuval Noah Harari's *21 Lessons for the 21st Century* and *Sapiens* reignited my passion for reading and writing, sparking a desire to explore the world further. These books empowered me, transforming and strengthening my spiritual world and prompting me to reflect on myself, my cultural environment, and my social group.

Importantly, my journey through reading volumes of *Asian Highland Perspectives*[1] made me realize that the lived experiences, cultural traditions, wisdom, and knowledge of ordinary people in my community - especially elders - are invaluable. These elders' worldviews, shaped by different experiences, offer perspectives in sharp contrast to modern society.

In my comparisons of various works on Tibetan life, particularly those exploring gender, I noticed a significant gap. Works focused on women are relatively few. As a woman who grew up witnessing the lives of local women and girls, I realized I had an

[1] AHP volumes and texts are free downloads at https://independent.academia.edu/AsianHighlandsPerspectivesJOURNAL, accessed 26 December 2024.

opportunity to record and study the experiences of rural Tibetan women. Thus, in 2022, I began interviewing local women about their childbirth experiences and expanded my focus to explore their experiences with menstruation and menopause in 2023.

I gained support from local women willing to share their experiences with me. Initially, they modestly said, "Women like me, who have never been to school, have nothing valuable to say and don't know how to say it."

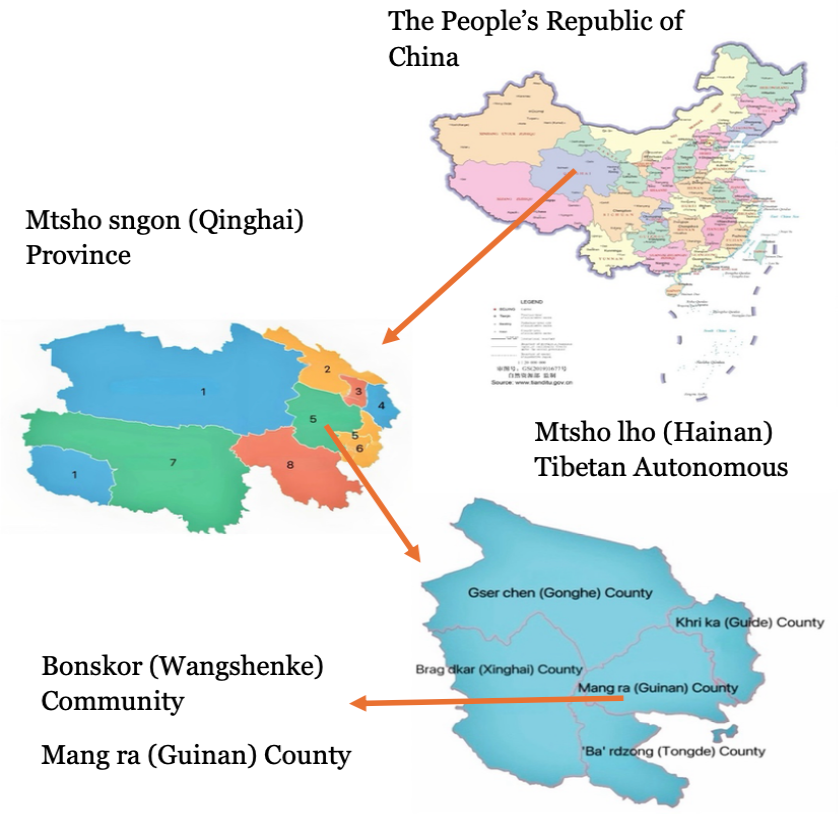
Nevertheless, they agreed to share their stories if I thought it would be helpful. I ensured the interview process felt informal and more like a regular conversation. This approach allowed the women to speak more freely, comfortably, and often beyond my prepared questions without feeling unnecessary pressure.

This book aims to amplify local women's voices and shed light on their inner struggles. Although many aspects of women's lives have changed as society continues to evolve, traditional ways of dealing with experiences such as childbirth and menstruation still shape their lives and often remain unspoken, kept quietly in their minds, hidden from men and younger generations of women. These deeply personal aspects of life have rarely been explored. This book can help raise awareness of the biological needs and challenges faced by women and girls, particularly in the realm of reproductive health - challenges that are often intensified by misunderstanding, cultural barriers, and societal indifference.

While this book does not present a complete picture of local women's lives, I hope it offers a meaningful glimpse into their internal experiences and external realities. Given my limited academic training and personal capacity, I acknowledge the book's shortcomings and kindly ask for your understanding.

LOCATION[2]

FIG 1. Bon skor (Wangshenke) Community, Mang ra (Guinan) County, Mtsho lho (Hainan) Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, Mtsho sngon (Qinghai) Province, PR China.


The People's Republic of China
Mtsho sngon (Qinghai) Province
Mtsho lho (Hainan) Tibetan Autonomous
Gser chen (Gonghe) County
Khri ka (Guide) County
Brag dkar (Xinghai) County
Mang ra (Guinan) County
'Ba' rdzong (Tongde) County
Bonskor (Wangshenke) Community
Mang ra (Guinan) County

BACKGROUND

The main setting for this book is Bon skor Community,[3] an agro-pastoral Tibetan community in Bya mdo Township, Mang ra County. Bonskor Community has agricultural and pastoral sections. The agricultural area is located at 35°53'10.71"N latitude and 100°51'49.42"E longitude, 112 kilometers south of Mang ra County Town in southeastern Mtsho lho and 200 kilometers (three hours by bus) from Zi ling (Xining) City, Mtsho sngon Province's capital.

[2] See APPENDIX 2 at the end of this book for map weblinks.
[3] See Nangchakja (2016:53-166) for more about this community.

Before 1986, Bon skor was located along the Rma chu 'Yellow River' in Bon po zhing kha.[4] After the construction of Tshal rgna Reservoir (Longyangxia) in 1986, the local government arranged for the community to relocate to designated sites. Today, the community comprises five *ru khag* 'brigades' (officially called *dui*). Four of the brigades resettled in an area known as Be len, about twenty kilometers from its original location. In contrast, Brigade Five relocated near Dgon thang Village, which was at a higher elevation near the Yellow River.

A single community committee administers all five brigades, though they are in separate locations.

In 2007, the continuous rise of the dammed Yellow River led to Brigade Five moving again to resettle near Mgo mang Township Town in Mang ra County.

The community had 2,200 residents and 570 households in five *ru khag* in 2022.[5] Farmland was allocated to each household in 1983. Grassland was divided and assigned to each household based on the number of family members and livestock from 2000 to 2003. Locals tend sheep, goats, and cattle and cultivate wheat, barley, and canola. Some families earned their livelihood through herding and farming, while others only farmed. Certain locals sold their livestock because of limited grazing land and rented their pastures to other families. Families with sheep, goats, and horses moved from one pasture to another on grazing land they had leased to sustain their livestock.

Families constructed large airbrick, closed-roof animal pens beginning in about 2019. Some families built them privately, while others received partial government support. Pens were mostly used for sheltering livestock in winter due to limited forage, harsh weather, and difficulty supplying water from distant water sources to livestock. Livestock were fed bales of hay in pens. Corn, barley, oats, and tap water were also provided.

Sheep, the main source of meat, were shorn during the fourth to sixth lunar months. Wool was used to make quilts, mattresses, and felt, and was sold for cash to Muslim buyers. A small amount of wool

[4] This was the fixed farming area. Locals moved frequently in herding areas.

[5] The local community leader provided this information.

was used in religious rituals, such as making *rmu thag*[6] for *lab rtse*[7] renewal.

Barley, wheat, and canola were used to make *rtsam pa* 'roasted barley flour', wheat flour, and oil, respectively, for family consumption. Surplus grain was sold for cash. Locals historically harvested crops by hand, but the contemporary use of harvest machines means few people are required.[8]

Each household had a brick house built with government subsidy in the farming area, which also featured a community *ma Ni* Hall,[9] A rig lha khang 'A rig Temple'/'Yul lha Temple',[10] a community kindergarten and elementary school for grades one to three, and a building for community committee offices.

Locals tended cattle in nearby pastures, feeding them hay and leftover food. Cows were milked to provide milk, butter, cheese, and yogurt for self-consumption. A few families earned income from selling milk and cheese to local community members. During the fifth to sixth lunar months, some locals regularly went to areas in Mgo log (Guoluo) Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture to collect caterpillar fungi.

Before 1958, camels were used to transport loads three to four times heavier than horses, including black yak-hair tents and other belongings, during local herders' seasonal migrations. However, only a few camels remained in Bon Skor Village in 2022. Fencing practices were barriers to movement and contributed to infrequent breeding.[11]

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[6] Very long wool threads. See Nangchukja (2011:230) for a photograph.
[7] Sacred places, usually at higher elevations, where mountain deities are worshipped.
[8] In August 2022, Bsod nams rab brtan (b. 1975) said he was the only community resident with a combine. He purchased it in 2020 and used it to harvest for locals and neighboring communities. He charged sixty RMB per *mu* (one *mu* = 0.67 hectares) and harvested about thirty *mu* daily.
[9] A place where religious activities (circumambulation, prostration, scripture chanting, turning prayer wheels, and so on) were held.
[10] This temple was destroyed during the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976). Afterward, some locals secretly went there and burned incense. The temple was rebuilt at its current location after resettlement in the 1980s, three kilometers from the current farming area, where locals often burned incense to pray for prosperity and protection. See Nangchukja (2016:100-103) for more.
[11] See Wen Changjia and Stuart (2014:110-113), Snying lcags rgyal (Nangchukja 2011:33-35), (Nangchukja 2016:59-62), and Skal bzang tshe brtan (2017a, 2017(b), 2021) for more on local camels. See

Official policy on environmental protection banned livestock from grazing on degraded pastures and pastures that were becoming desert, contributing to a dwindling number of people engaged in herding.[12] Many residents abandoned herding and migrated to county and township towns, where they opened grocery stores, snack shops, and Tibetan clothing stores or took jobs as restaurant workers, cleaners, and tailors. Other migrants remained unemployed due to a lack of skills and an inability to adapt to non-herding work. Still other residents resumed traditional life, herding, buying sheep, and renting grasslands.

In 1987, the County Education Bureau initiated a primary school project in the local community's farming area. Each student was required to provide 500 kilograms of sheep droppings and cow dung for fuel, seven and a half kilos of mutton, and one hundred kilos of grain. In addition, each student paid thirty to fifty RMB per semester. These requirements continued until 2006.[13] Schooling was nearly free in the local community before the 1980s.

Parents increasingly sent children to schools after 2000 because of an awareness of education's importance and the enforcement of the nine-year Compulsory Education policy. Currently, apart from a three-year kindergarten program offered locally, children should attend a boarding school starting at the age of seven,[14] beginning with the first year of primary school in the local township town. The school follows a cycle of twelve days of classes followed by four days off. In 2024, all school courses were taught in Chinese, except for a Tibetan language class, unlike in the past. With locals' growing belief that learning Chinese offers a brighter future, coupled with the perception that Chinese-only schools provide higher quality education, many families now send their children to these schools, where Tibetan classes are not offered.

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https://archive.org/details/TibetanCamelPacking_20180308 for a video of packing a camel, accessed 2 December 2024.

[12] Certain grasslands began to be restricted from grazing by the government in 2016, with local grassland owners compensated 12.6 RMB per *mu* annually. In 2022, the subsidy increased to 15.38 RMB per *mu*. Grazing was still banned.

[13] See Nangchukja (2016:120).

[14] This is the required age for attending primary school, as stipulated by local educational policy.

The community's residents include a few Bon devotees, but most are Dge lugs followers. Every year, residents hold multiple religious rituals collectively and privately to seek spiritual satisfaction, protect themselves from illness and natural catastrophes, and strengthen their sense of community.

OVERVIEW

Part One features four articles on rural Tibetan women's lived experiences, presented in their own voices.

The first article explores the cultural and ideological concepts, practices, and beliefs associated with traditional Tibetan pregnancy, childbirth, midwifery, postpartum, and infant care, as well as transitions in Bon skor Community as expressed in interviews with six local women. Four women had traditional home delivery, and two gave birth in a hospital. Insights are provided into traditional childbirth grounded in a gendered context of rapidly altering customs.

The second article focuses on Tibetan menstruation, examining historical beliefs and practices surrounding menarche and menstruation, focusing on the experiences of five Tibetan women born between 1960 and 1972 who grew up in a traditional society where period products were initially unavailable, only gradually becoming available in the late 1990s. These women adhered to the cultural norm of silence regarding menstruation. Discussion about menstruation experiences was considered disgraceful. Women internalized their menarche-related fear, confusion, and anxiety. Furthermore, dealing with menstrual blood posed challenges, leading to embarrassment and humiliation. Menstruation was interwoven with taboos and restrictions as society changed, including abstention from sex, certain foods, and drinks, and refraining from visiting religious sites and the family's shrine room. Insights are provided on the cultural perceptions and practices surrounding menstruation in Tibetan society, revealing the evolving dynamics of this aspect of women's lives.

The third article centers on the experiences, perceptions, and knowledge of menopause among six rural Tibetan women. Despite the growing availability of medical care and health information in 2024, significant gaps in knowledge about women's reproductive

health persist in the rural Tibetan community where this study was conducted in 2023. Participants expressed limited understanding of menopause, primarily associating it with the later stages of life, typically in their forties and fifties. Neither the women nor their family members fully understood the symptoms of menopause health challenges and their potential mental and physical health impacts. Consequently, women often did not attribute discomfort to menopause. Some sought medical care when experiencing health issues, while others did so only when symptoms were severe. Cultural and religious practices were also relied upon to address symptoms. The six participants were born between 1945 and 1972 and were illiterate. Of the six participants, four had experienced menopause, while two were currently going through it. This study highlights the need for increased awareness and education on menopause in rural Tibetan communities.

The fourth article is a short piece reflecting on my paternal Grandmother, Lha sgron's (1946-2023), views and experiences with ornaments. A herder for most of her life, she was a dedicated Buddhist and became a nun in 2012. I interviewed her in Bon skor.

Part Two includes four short stories. The first is a travel account of a 2016 journey I took with my parents and local community members to Thailand, Singapore, and Malaysia. It captures the reflections and reactions of the elders who traveled with us and encountered new cuisines, customs, religious sites and rituals, tourist attractions, and cultural differences.

The second story is focused on themes such as marital conflict and women's health issues and draws on my experiences and those of local women.

The third and fourth stories reflect on childhood memories. One story recounts the time I injured my hand, and the other describes a spirit medium's visit to our home.

Part Three features two photo essays highlighting important aspects of Bon skor Community life. The first showcases religious activities and significant local sacred sites. The second focuses on reciprocal labor relationships among local women, capturing communal efforts such as bread-making and dumpling preparation for events like Lo sar (Tibetan New Year) and weddings, and highlighting key food displays presented during wedding ceremonies.

PART ONE
RURAL WOMEN'S VOICES

CHILDBIRTH IN BON SKOR: BELIEFS, PERSPECTIVES, AND PRACTICES

A central purpose of having children in Bon skor is to continue the patrilineal line of descent by strongly favoring males over females. Parents with no children are often given a child (preferably male) by their siblings or close relatives to carry on their family line. If the children are only females, one girl must stay home and eventually bring a husband to her home with the expectation of producing an heir. Giving birth to more than one child provides companionship among siblings and, importantly, mutual assistance between siblings when encountering predicaments. Locals feel relationships between cousins are more distant than siblings, highlighting the importance of having close siblings to assist in times of need.

A historical lack of contraception meant women had little choice in childbirth. Once pregnant, women had to give birth, sometimes against their will, and birth intervals were often short. When the first child was unwell, locals believed that having a second child would help the first child recover. The younger sibling was understood to be similar to the older sibling's amulet, protecting against illness.

LITERATURE REVIEW

I recognize considerable research on Tibetan childbirth. For example, Google Scholar returned 7,910 citations when "Tibetan childbirth" was input.[15] Craig (2009), for example, described the biosocial landscape of pregnancy and childbirth among Tibetan communities in the Asian highlands. After a short dialogue about birthing with a local woman in the Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR), she explored Tibetan knowledge and practices during pregnancy and parturition. She also described mortality and morbidity rates in Tibetan areas, how pregnancy and birth are intertwined with Tibetan Buddhism and

[15] https://scholar.google.com/scholar?hl=en&as_sdt=0,5&q=Tibetan+childbirth&oq=T, accessed 23 December 2024.

medicine, and the nutritional prescriptions and restrictions codified in Traditional Tibetan Medicine (TTM) theory. A tendency to generalize Tibetan birth-giving is evident, e.g., "women often give birth alone. Sometimes, women will deliver in an animal pen" (150), and "the consumption of alcohol is common during pregnancy in many Tibetan areas" (155). These generalizations do not describe childbirth in Bon skor.

Adams et al. (2005a) applied anthropological methods to collect data by interviewing thirty-eight rural Tibetan women in the TAR. The purpose of this study was to initiate a village birth attendant training program appropriate to the rural Tibetan context, where the maternal mortality ratio was reported to be as high as 400-500/100,000 for some areas, and the infant mortality within the first twelve months was as high as twenty to thirty percent in some areas (statistics based on reports from both the TAR Health Bureau (2001–2003) and the Mal gro gung dkar (Mozhugongka) County Health Bureau (2003), and independent reporting as part of One HEART's midwife training program reporting, monitoring, and evaluation. The study described and analyzed rural Tibetan women's conceptions of safe delivery according to biomedicine. Some findings of this study correspond with my study site, e.g.:

> ...having a safe delivery involved doing a variety of things to protect oneself and unborn fetus and, later, the newborn, from potential harm. These efforts revolved around the following key categories: fear of attacks by spirits/demons and negative health effects of meeting strangers; fear of and taboos against pollution/defilement (*grib*)... (826).

Based on interviews with eight women, Klu mo tshe ring and Roche (2011) studied Tibetan childbirth in two villages of Rdo sbis Township, Xunhua Salar (Sala) Autonomous County, Mtsho sngon Province. This study site and mine are both agro-pastoral areas, 250 kilometers apart. Their study reports differences in childbirth practices. For example, one of the interviewees described the position during the delivery:

When a woman is giving birth, we ask her to crouch and lean back against something. This makes birth easier, but the best way is for the woman to stand (53).

Moreover, the baby's grandfather puts the afterbirth in a cloth bag and buries it. However, in Bon skor, a woman often buried the placenta three to seven days after delivery. These differences highlight the need for more local studies to comprehensively describe the many Tibetan regional variations in childbirth.

According to a study by Kunchok Gyaltsen et al. (2007) of the lives and health of Tibetan women and children in rural Mtsho sngon, only thirty percent of women visited healthcare providers during pregnancy, and almost all (ninety-three percent) of the respondents gave birth at home. The rates of professional birth attendance were low because most village doctors were not trained to assist in childbirth. Moreover, most healthcare workers were men and culturally prohibited from childbirth in certain Tibetan areas. Furthermore, part of the reason is that families couldn't afford to travel to or stay at the township or county town where medical care was available before the delivery. The same study noted that the national birth planning program from 1982-2016 increased awareness of and access to contraception in rural areas. Breastfeeding was common; ninety-seven percent of women had breastfed their babies. The authors concluded that women offered complementary foods to infants at one, two, and five months. *Rtsam pa*,[16] wheat flour soup, and meat were common supplementary foods given to infants, which accords with what my interviewees told me.

CONSULTANTS

I interviewed six local Tibetan women in January, February, and August 2022. I talked privately with each woman (one-on-one) to reduce their discomfort and embarrassment. The interviewees' names have been changed to protect their privacy, but their ages are real.

[16] A staple food made from roasted barley flour. Hot tea, butter, sugar to taste, and dried cheese were often added.

Each consultant's background is provided, along with their childbirth experiences. Four had vaginal deliveries without intervention at home. They were the last generations practicing traditional home birth. In contrast, the other two had hospital deliveries, one by cesarean section and one by vaginal delivery.

Questions prepared before the interviews, which were recorded on the phone, shaped discussions with each consultant. The women were also encouraged to discuss their birthing experiences beyond the questions. Afterward, I summarized their key points.

The interviewees used the terms used in the interviews, including Colloquial Tibetan (CT), Literary Tibetan (LT), and Chinese, which I clarified in the footnotes.

These six local women were chosen as consultants for this research because they are women of different generations who lived in different social conditions. The two in their seventies and the two in their fifties represent the last generations to give birth at home. Two younger women who had experienced hospital delivery were included in the study to illustrate recent changes in childbirth.

Women in their seventies were traditional women giving birth at short intervals without access to contraception. One gave birth to ten children, and the other gave birth to eight. Women in their fifties gave birth to fewer children due to government policy on birth control and access to contraception.

ACCOUNT ONE: BTSUN KHO (B. 1944)

Women of my generation gave birth at home, which is different from childbirth today. We lacked access to physical examinations, prenatal check-ups, and medical care from doctors who specialized in birthing.

Women gave birth to many children at very short birth intervals. Most women had eight to fifteen children. I gave birth to ten children. We did not have much choice in childbirth. Once pregnant, we had to give birth, sometimes against our will. When I stopped menstruating, I worried I would have another child who would be another burden, but I had no choice because I lacked access to contraception.

We lived in the time of the *gung hre* (Ch, *gongshe* 'communes'),[17] so I had to work in the *shengchandui* 'production teams' until I went into labor. Otherwise, I would not have received *gongfen* 'work points'.[18]

Though religious activities were prohibited, my family secretly asked a monk to chant *Tshe dbang*[19] during my pregnancy.

All the food was chemical-free, which made it healthier. As living conditions improved, more food choices became available. Nevertheless, some foods are harmful to pregnant women and fetuses and would likely lead to illness if consumed. The meat of a sheep killed by wolves or dead from being trapped in mud was taboo because it might change the baby's sex, cause an early birth, or a child's death.

The only source of medication was from a Tibetan doctor in the local township town who often prescribed three types of powdered Tibetan medicine. One was for prenatal consumption, one during labor,

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[17] The locally known *mi dmangs gung hre* (officially, *renmin gongshe* 'people's commune') were established in 1958. Locals also used *nga brgyad lo'i zing 'khrug* 'chaos in 1958', *za ma dka ngal gyi dus* 'food shortage period', and *'byor med yar langs* 'uprising of poor people' for that chaotic period. The state confiscated locals' farmland and livestock. Residents plowed land, cultivated, watered, and harvested wheat, barley, and canola. The state collected the community's wheat, barley, canola, animals, and animal products. The Village Committee controlled cropland and livestock. The harvest portion given to the state was *'bru khya* (LT: *'bru khral* (Ch, *liangshui*) 'grain tax'. The remaining wheat was stored and later distributed to households based on *gongfen* 'work points'. According to Gsang sgrog, a local man (b. 1945), *zhing sa sger la bgo ba* 'assigning cropland to private owners', *zog lug sger la bgo ba* 'dividing livestock to private owners', and Baochan Daohu 'return property to households' policies began to be implemented in Bon skor from 1981 to 1982. Each household acquired individual farmland and livestock. Locals subsequently cultivated their own farmland and raised their own livestock. *Bzo zhing* 'agro-industrial' tax was another tax after the 1980s. Out of one hundred sheep and goats per household, seven to eight livestock were mandatory taxes paid to the township town and government. *Bzo zhing* was abolished in the late 1990s.

[18] Those who could work were expected to support their families and had to work daily to earn *gongfen,* which was the standard for money and some grain distribution. Family members who could work supported children, elders, and the disabled, who did not receive this portion.

[19] A scripture often chanted to protect a pregnant woman and her fetus and ensure long lives. After chanting, the woman consumed a small round piece of sweet *rstam pa* known as *tshe sgrub ril bu* 'longevity pellet' and tasted a liquid called *tshe chang* 'longevity liquor'.

and another for postpartum use. They were all supposed to relieve pain during and after labor.

People preferred having male children because they could stay home to continue the *khyim rgyud* 'lineage'.

We often predict the unborn baby's sex based on the curvature of the belly. If the belly is round and the posture is elevated, it is likely male. If the belly is flatter and lower, it is likely a female. Locals commonly remark that females sit forward and kneel in the mother's uterus, signifying they would move to another family when they marry. Males turn backward and sit cross-legged, meaning they would stay at home. My experience was in accord with what other women said. Labor for male infants was more difficult with back pain, while labor for female infants was less difficult with abdominal pain.

During the farming season, I tied my firstborn to my back with a sash and went to the fields, where I hollowed out a small circular hole with my weeding tool and lined it with a plastic sheet where he could rest and lean back. We called this *skyid dung* 'joyful circular space'.[20] An umbrella was used to shade the baby when possible. Afterward, we weeded the fields and fed the baby when it cried. This was all common local practice.

As my older children grew up, they helped care for the younger ones, allowing me to leave them at home while I farmed.

Some women were attended to by their husbands when they gave birth, but I was mostly accompanied by a close friend who had eight children. We helped each other give birth. I carefully considered who to choose as a birth attendant because untrustworthy women speak negatively about you behind your back after serving as your midwife. My first childbirth was attended by a woman famous for having easy labor. Locals often invited her as a birth attendant. They believed her presence would somehow ease their labor. I had easy labor for my first child.

My birth attendant was responsible for giving massages during labor contraction and cutting the *lte thag* 'umbilical cord' after delivery. Infants were wrapped in lambskin and washed three to seven days after delivery in lukewarm water with a few juniper needles and some salt. After this initial wash, they were bathed once or twice yearly.

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[20] A term local women used to describe where babies lay or sat while mothers were busy with agricultural labor.

Soon after birth, if I lacked breastmilk, I often fed a bit of butter to the baby. A sheep is often slaughtered after delivery to help the mother gain energy and have sufficient milk for the baby. Before eating meat, my mother asked me to chew a piece of leg meat, spit it out, and then have sausage specially made for me. The main food I had was mutton broth and soup with *rtsam pa*. I also drank tea with black sugar that would help discharge the lochia.

Women were allowed one month of rest after birth during the communal labor period, but I only rested for seven days since no one could help me with cooking and house chores. After delivery, the commune administration provided black sugar and a sheep.

People often say that the postpartum period should last for one month. Gradual interaction with Chinese people influenced the concept of postpartum because my mother's and grandmother's generations didn't rest for even a day.

Women who gave birth in their husbands' homes were not allowed to give birth on the adobe bed where family members slept and ate since they were not from or born in this family. The delivery was thought to pollute the hearth or irritate the stove spirit, causing trouble for the family's well-being. Instead, they gave birth on the earthen floor, preferably near the *thab ka* 'adobe stove', where they could stay warm.

Conversely, a woman who gave birth at her natal home was allowed to use the adobe bed. Sheep or horse dung powder was prepared before the delivery. Horse dung was preferred because it had a mild smell compared to sheep dung. Besides, some said mares gave birth easily, so we used horse dung. A tattered sheep or goatskin discarded after delivery was placed atop the dung powder. Not all women could give birth in a predetermined place. Some women unexpectedly gave birth outside the home or in the family yard.

I did not move to my husband's home after my marriage. I stayed at my parents' home with my husband, so I gave birth at my natal home and was allowed to deliver on my family's adobe bed covered with powdered horse dung and old sheep skin. I wore a *bang rtsag*[21] with nothing under it during labor. I knelt and gripped a long sash fastened to a wooden ceiling pole to elevate my upper body to give birth.

[21] Women in labor wore a sheepskin robe typically worn in daily life.

It was considered harmful and potentially fatal if the *gzhug*[22] 'placenta' was not expelled soon after delivery. Local women hoped the placenta would discharge naturally. Several local women died when this did not occur.

Certain older community women removed a retained placenta by rolling the umbilical cord onto their index finger and slowly drawing it out. At the same time, the palm of the other hand circled the belly. One of my contemporaries died of excessive bleeding after a long period of placenta retention. Fortunately, I did not experience such problems.

We had no pads, so blood, secretions, and the placenta were discharged onto the dung powder instead of the ground. It was considered harmful to the infant and mother if the latter occurred. The wet portion of the dung powder and the placenta were placed to one side. Within three to seven days, the placenta was packed in a bag with dung powder and buried in ashes outside the house, often by a woman. My mother buried mine beneath the house floor near the adobe bed. In other cases, it was buried beneath the doorway, believing this would prevent future harm.

Cow dung or firewood was placed at the house entrance, signifying that a woman had given birth for one to two weeks following the birth. Only immediate family members were permitted to enter, particularly at night, to protect the mother's and infant's health. In other instances, individuals were allowed to enter the house but were expected to step over a fire or through the smoke before entering. They were not allowed to enter a small separate room where the infant and mother resided.

A *'dzong khug* 'handmade felt bag with filtered fine ash' was most commonly used to collect a baby's urine and excrement. The infant was often placed in this bag with the bag's mouth reaching the baby's chest. Two cloth strips fastened to the bag's mouth were knotted to prevent the *'dzong khug* from sliding down. Caregivers occasionally stirred the ash wetted by the urine to balance the dried and wet ash. The ash was replaced at least twice a day.

[22] The term locals commonly used to refer to the placenta. *Bu rogs* 'baby's companion' was also used.

A *bla ma* or monk often determined the *lag ljibs* 'baby's first clothing'. It was suggested that one of my children wear red clothes, so I used a piece of red cloth to make a dress.

We offered *bsang* 'incense' if the baby was a male, and an auspicious day was selected for the infant's first outing. A family member held the infant and circled the house, usually on a horse, for some minutes. There were no such activities after the birth of a girl.

A *bla ma* or a knowledgeable elder gave my children names within three or seven days after birth. Children's names were changed if the baby was ill or cried a lot. None of my children had a name change.

When children cried a lot, especially at night, in a way they did not often do, we assumed loud noise had frightened them. In that case, I often held a piece of burning firewood or cow dung in a clamp and circled it over the child's head while saying:

TEXT AS SPOKEN

[1]ངྱི་ཞི་ལི་(ཞི་མོ་) མ་སྐྱག
[2]ས་སྐྱག རྡོ་སྐྱག
[3]སྨྱེ་ལིང་དམར་དྲིས་སྐྱག

[1]ngi zhi li/zhi mo ma skyag.
[2]sa skyag, rdo skyag.
[3]mye ling dmar dris skyag.

LITERARY POETIC TEXT

[1]ངའི་ཞི་ལི་(ཞི་མོ་) མ་སྐྲག
[2]ས་སྐྲག རྡོ་སྐྲག
[3]མེ་ལིང་དམར་དྲིས་འདིར་སྐྲག

[1]ng'i zhi li/zhi mo ma skrag.
[2]sa skrag, rdo skrag.
[3]me ling dmar dris 'dir skrag.

TRANSLATION

[1]Do not fear, my child.
[2]Fear earth, fear stone.
[3]Fear this little flaming fuel.

When I finished chanting, I placed the burnt fuel in a bowl of water in front of the infant to remove their fear, which often calmed the child. An infant's head, belly, and chest were often washed with *khrus chu* 'sacred water'[23] blown on by a holy *bla ma* or a monk.

Zha nye skor ba 'lead melting' (a detailed description from another interviewee follows) was another ritual. It was risky and was practiced with caution. I rarely practiced it, though other locals often did, considering it beneficial.[24] When infants were taken outdoors, soot on a pot bottom was rubbed between their eyebrows or nose to prevent *grib* 'defilement'[25] that affects infants' health.

ACCOUNT TWO: LHA MTSHO (B. 1946)

Life was joyful and excellent before 1958 without any life concerns. We had rich and abundant food - butter, cheese, yogurt, *rtsam pa*, and meat. We also had splendid coral necklaces, silver adornments, and robes. Our life changed dramatically in 1958. People experienced food shortages, and beloved members of my family died during periods of chaos. In the year I was twelve, communal labor began. Farming and herding were separated. I stayed in the farming area, where we plowed fields and cultivated barley, canola, and wheat. Horses, donkeys, and mules pulled a threshing stone over wheat and barley stalks spread on the threshing ground. The grain was put in the communal administration granary, and we dined collectively in the communal dining hall. Sometimes, we consumed wheat bran and wild edible plants.

I married when I was seventeen and moved to my husband's family. I had eight children, one of whom was stillborn.

It was inevitable to give birth to many children during my time because we had no contraceptives like today.

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[23] Sacred water was used to soothe infants. It was also believed to remove ailments from the body via the power of *bla ma* or monks chanting scriptures while sanctifying the water.

[24] For a vivid 2019 video example of using molten lead with a child in Chu ring (Qurang) Village, Thang dkar ma (Tanggemu) Town, Gser chen (Gonghe) County, Mtsho lho Prefecture, see Skal bzang tshe brtan (2019).

[25] Invisible pollution that causes human illness, usually through encountering unclean things, eating contaminated food, and wearing unclean clothes.

During my first trimester of pregnancy, I was very sick, lacked appetite, was tired, and vomited a lot. We had no medication.

I longed for a son because a man's great physical strength would allow him to work hard. It's hard to depend on a son-in-law. More importantly, a son is an honor for the parents after their deaths since he deals with their corpses rather than other males. A daughter is not allowed to do this.

During my first pregnancy, my father-in-law consulted *bla ma* about my safety and that of my unborn child. The *bla ma* advised that I not eat meat from outside, especially *gri sha/dbab sha*[26] and *tshe thar* 'free life',[27] offer incense, and return to my natal home to safely give birth to a son. My family did as he advised. Religious activities were banned, so we couldn't do rituals and much religious chanting.

My first child (a son) was born in my natal home in a black-yak-hair tent at the *mo khyim* 'women's side' near the tent opening, instead of at the back of the tent and *pho khyim* 'men's side'.[28] The childbirth and discharge were considered filthy, polluting, and would irritate the deities, so *bang lud* 'dung powder' was spread on the ground, and I gave birth, kneeling and wearing a sheepskin robe. It lasted three days and was my most difficult labor. My mother and another woman who had easy labor attended me, massaging my back. At midnight, during my labor contraction, my husband confidentially called a local tantric practitioner who families often summoned during difficult labor. He

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[26] These terms locally referred to the meat of a sheep that died from falling from a mountain, wolf attack, or being stuck in mud.

[27] This term described the custom of liberating/saving a sheep from death (*tshe blu* and *srog blu* were also used). According to Lha sgron, liberating a sheep involved smearing butter on the horns, all four hooves, nose, ears, upper lip, and tail. A woolen thread knotted with a tuft of wool (*srung rtags* 'protection mark') was attached to the sheep's back. Juniper needles were burned for purification. Afterward, *chu dkar dkar* 'white water'/'water mixed with milk' was poured onto the sheep from its rear to its head, while *chu nag nag* 'black water'/'cold water' was poured from the head to the rear. It was a good sign if the sheep shook. Locals believed this ritual helped a person have a long life. After an animal was freed, it was not slaughtered but could be sheared, and its lambs could be slaughtered.

[28] Where men and women sat in a black yak-hair tent was determined by gender. The *mo khyim* 'women's side' was on the left when entering a tent, and to the right was the *pho khyim* 'men's side'. Buddhist images or scriptures were often at the upper part of the men's side.

chanted scriptures, blessed me with prayer beads, and sprayed *khrus chu* over my body from his mouth. When labor was prolonged, my uncle offered incense and sprinkled alcohol for local deities, imploring the mountain deities to protect and bless my baby and me. Meanwhile, my husband secretly went to the former A rig lha khang site and offered *bsang*, put sheep wool on a caragana tree to liberate the trees[29] there, and implored Yul lha that I safely give birth.

Widows and women whose children had died were not allowed to be birth attendants for fear they would bring bad luck to the unborn baby.

Soon after birth, I didn't have milk to nurse my son, so my husband fed him a little butter. A day later, my family slaughtered the sheep the commune administration provided. After having *rgyu sha*,[30] I gained strength and energy and produced more breast milk. I also often had a watery mixture of tea with black sugar. Occasionally, a small amount of deer musk was added to mutton soup, which was good for my recovery.

It is extremely important to keep warm after childbirth, so I wore my sheepskin robe and wrapped my head with a headscarf to stay warm. My mother and aunt often said that if a woman did not remain warm and touched cold water, she may have health issues such as joint pain, menstrual disorders, etc. They often said drinking cold water after delivery was deadly, so I avoided drinking anything cold. Also, it was said that cold wind blowing into the eyes soon after birth would hurt the eyes.

We attributed health issues after the first childbirth to the incomplete discharge of lochia and inadequate attention to diet and physical protection. We believed a woman would recover from the second childbirth, provided she protected herself appropriately. For example, she should avoid cold drinks and stay warm by wearing a thick sheepskin robe for at least several weeks. This facilitates lochia and excretion of bad secretions retained during childbirth.

After several childbirth experiences with female birth attendants, I gave birth to children with my husband's assistance. I severed the

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[29] Locals customarily liberated trees by attaching sheep wool tufts to the branches, which meant cutting such trees was taboo. Trees were liberated for longevity and to sustain life, especially in the case of illness.

[30] Sausage stuffed with blood and minced meat from sheep legs and the neck specially made for lying-in women.

umbilical cord, washed my newborns with lukewarm water containing a few juniper needles, and wrapped them in lambskin.

Infants' clothes were not prepared before their birth. Instead, we made clothes after asking a knowledgeable person for the color of the clothes they should wear.

A fetus's sex may change in the mother's uterus or shortly after delivery. A male can change into a female, but not vice versa. For example, strangers' arrival at night at home during late pregnancy is believed to cause a sex change, so pregnant women are generally not allowed to greet guests. Also, food outside the house is considered unhealthy because it might cause *grib*.[31]

During one of my late pregnancies, my husband and several carpenters came to my house late in the afternoon. That night, I had acute abdominal pain, and my labor started. A *bla ma* had predicted that the baby would be male, but it was female after birth. We believed that the sex had changed because of the carpenters' arrival. Soon after birth, I saw that my daughter's vagina was red, which suggested that her sex might really have changed.

Locals often said when a male infant is born, a person should immediately touch the infant's penis to prevent sex change.

My oldest son was frequently ill with fever and diarrhea from the time he was four months old. A local *bla ma* told my husband and me that a younger sibling would be the older sibling's *srung 'khor* 'amulet', meaning that the presence of the younger sibling had the power to protect the older sibling from illnesses. Consequently, he recovered after I delivered my second child.

I gave my children short two-syllable *gces ming* 'nicknames' based on their formal names. Nicknames are convenient and signify love and care.

Infants often slept with their mothers, who were primary caregivers for the infants after delivery. Fathers seldom engaged in childrearing. Although fathers sometimes provided temporary care for children, the frequency and duration of such care did not match that of the mothers.

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[31] Pregnant women and fetuses were considered vulnerable and easily influenced by *grib* people and items they might bring. A fetus undergoing a sex change might have resulted from a pregnant woman encountering *grib*.

The mother woke up at least three to four times to breastfeed when there was a newborn. In extreme cases, a mother stayed up all night to care for a constantly crying newborn. Mothers slept less than fathers, who slept as normal. Mothers carried their children while doing housework during the day. Some mothers carried their newborns tied with a sash on their backs, while others put them in their robe pouch.

My older children played an important role in childrearing, caring for their younger siblings, and lessening my burden.

Infants frightened by loud noises, animals, vehicles, and so on often cried and sometimes screamed, especially at night. To dispel the fear, we practiced *zha nye skor ba*. This involved melting lead in a ladle with a piece of sheep fat over a stove's open fire. When it was completely molten, the scoop was swirled above the baby's head with the person holding the scoop saying:

TEXT AS SPOKEN

[1]ས་སྐྱག རྡོ་སྐྱག
[2]མྱེ་སྐྱག་ན་མྱི་འདྲ་འདྲ།
[3]ཁྱེ་སྐྱག་ན་ཁྱི་འདྲ་འདྲ།
[4]སྐྱགས་སྐྱག་ཐམས་ཅད་འདེ་ཤོག

[1]Sa skyag, rdo skyag.
[2]Mye skyag na myi 'dra 'dra,
[3]Khye sgyag na khyi 'dra 'dra,
[4]Skygs skyag thams cad 'de shog.

LITERARY TEXT

[1]ས་སྐྱག རྡོ་སྐྱག
[2]མི་ལ་སྐྲག་ན་མི་འདྲ་འདྲ།
[3]ཁྱི་ལ་སྐྲག་ན་ཁྱི་འདྲ་འདྲ།
[4]སྐྲག་སྐྲག་ཐམས་ཅད་འདིར་ཤོག

[1]Sa skyag, rdo skyag.
[2]Mi la skrag na mi 'dra 'dra,
[3]khye la skrag na khyi 'dra 'dra,
[4]skrag skrag thams cad 'dir shog.

TRANSLATION

[1]Fear earth, fear stone.
[2]Fear man, akin to man.
[3]Fear dog, akin to dog.
[4]All those feared may come here.

After swirling the scoop of molten lead three times, it was poured into a bowl of cold water in front of the infant. The infant was drawn to the lead as it was poured into the water. Locals assumed the molten lead would solidify into an image resembling a dog, cat, or a man that had terrified the infant. The dread was removed by touching the infant's forehead and chest with the solid lead removed from the water. Finally, the lead was melted again into a circular shape, a hole was made in the center, and it was sewn onto the infant's clothing with a thread to protect the child from fear.

ACCOUNT THREE: BYAMS SKYID (B. 1962)

I began tending my family's goat kids and lambs when I was six. My parents divorced when I was six. My mother and grandmother raised me. During the communal labor era, the entire community shared pastureland and livestock. We lived in a black yak-hair tent in the pastoral area of our community and migrated seasonally to tend sheep and goats. We were sometimes required to go to the farming area to plow and weed communal fields and harvest barley, canola, and wheat.

Recently, most people have stopped herding livestock and farming and have moved to the township town, where officials constructed houses for them. But I am reluctant to give up herding because there is no work I can do to earn a livelihood in a township town, so I am still here in the old place, herding sheep, even though my family owns a brick house near the township town.

I got married at twenty-two and moved to my husband's family near the Rma chu 'Yellow River'. I gave birth to four children. I delivered my first child when I was twenty-three.

I didn't know I was pregnant until I told a woman I craved and even dreamed of dumplings. She said that I was going to have a child. It was true.

Women generally conceal pregnancy, so I didn't tell anyone I was pregnant except my husband. Others know you are pregnant when your belly protrudes. I never visited a doctor nor had medical tests during my pregnancies.

Although life was challenging, I longed for children. People need company when they are young and elderly. Besides, there was no birth control until the mid-1980s. It was prohibited for women to have more than three children. Local women were required to undergo *jiezha* 'sterilization'.[32] Physicians came to the community yearly to take women to the local township town for sterilization, but I didn't go. I didn't have time to rest, and no one would have cared for me after the procedure. After my fourth child, the government fined my family 300 RMB, a huge sum then.

I spent five days in bed after my first childbirth and then resumed weeding the fields wearing a sheepskin robe with other women. My mother-in-law requested I return home and prepare lunch at noon. I kneaded the fermenting dough to make bread, but my mind went blank. When I regained consciousness, I had fallen and stepped on the dough. The metal plate for holding bread lay next to me. I was dizzy and had no idea how I had fallen. I had difficulty concentrating on what I was doing until it finally registered that I was preparing lunch.

I quickly stood with an anxious and concerned mind. I worried about handling the dough I had stepped on, now dirt-contaminated. Terrified that others would see and humiliate me as a newlywed, I threw it into a pigsty trough. Despite being famished, I was exhausted from making bread and frying potatoes for lunch.

I was so weak and disoriented twenty days after delivery that I could no longer do household duties. I had no desire to do anything but lie in bed and sleep. My uncle understood my situation, came on horseback with another horse for me, and escorted me to my natal home, where my family slaughtered a sheep for me. I recovered after many days of rest.

There were criteria for women chosen as birth attendants at that time. There were no professional midwives. Normally, women were invited to serve as midwives who were not widows, who had multiple

[32] *Jiezha* is a Chinese term used by local doctors for ligation. No Tibetan term is used.

sons, and none of their children had died. We believed being accompanied by such women eased the delivery process and made birth safer. Conversely, widows and those whose children had died carried bad luck.

A local woman with thirteen children attended my first birth. I gave birth alone to my other children. Unlike most women, I wanted to give birth alone. I didn't even allow my mother to attend to me during labor. I felt uneasy and uncomfortable delivering near a midwife. Despite the intense agony of labor contractions while delivering my first child, I could not utter a sound. After labor, I found that my quilt was torn because I had gnawed it.

I became pregnant with my second daughter at the age of twenty-six. The most memorable and dangerous work I did during my pregnancy was on the roof of a house on the verge of collapse. The house was very close to the rising Yellow River.[33] One afternoon, I collected timber from that house to build an adobe house in an area where we herded around eighty goats. The roof suddenly collapsed as I removed soil from the roof, sending me plummeting to the ground surrounded by wood and roiling dust. I was unable to move. I sat there with extreme pain in my waist until my husband arrived late in the afternoon. Fortunately, I landed on my buttocks, and my belly was unharmed, or I might have miscarried. The discomfort in my back lingered for months, even during labor. It was the most excruciating childbirth I experienced.

My spouse and I split the cropland and harvested evenly late in my fourth pregnancy. I harvested wheat with a sickle while physically frail and uncomfortable with intermittent leg cramps and swollen feet. I had never complained before, but sometimes, I couldn't help but groan from the searing pain in my legs and back. This infuriated my husband, who accused me of being slow. He left soon after completing his portion of harvest duty. The weather was sweltering. I used every bit of my energy until late afternoon to finish my duties. I prepared supper after I returned home.

[33] In 2007, the rise of the Rma chu due to the dam creating Tshal rnga Reservoir 'Longyang Xia' led Brigade Five to resettle near Mgo mang (Guomaying) Township Town in the north of Mang ra County.

My first and second children were girls. We wanted a boy, so my family invited Bla ma Kho tshe[34] (1949-2016) to our home. He instructed me to go to Sku 'bum Monastery,[35] chant *Gcod pa*[36] 500 times, and prostrate in front of the Gser gdung.[37] I did what he advised and eventually delivered a son.

I longed for a son because a male doesn't need to experience many of the hardships experienced by a female, such as menstruation, childbirth, and raising children. Besides, women must leave their parents and serve their husbands' families, while a man can stay at home and has the freedom to pursue his interests.

We usually guess the baby's sex by the shape of the mother's belly. If the belly is round and the posture is elevated, it is likely male. If the belly is flatter and lower, it is likely female. The baby is probably a girl if the mother has significant physical discomfort, such as nausea, lethargy, and loss of appetite. In contrast, if the woman has no physical discomfort in the first trimester, the baby is likely a boy.

Before my third labor, my *bang chu* 'amniotic fluid' leaked as I sat on the ground near the pigsty with my mother-in-law and another woman. I was too embarrassed to tell them or stand. I waited till their departure. My trousers were smeared with dirt. I immediately returned to the house and put on my robe. There were no further indications of impending birth for the next two days. On the third night, my abdomen was uncomfortable, but I did not inform anyone, not even my husband, who was sleeping after supper. I feel restricted and uncomfortable when someone is near me during labor, so I retreated to the small bedroom I shared with my husband and locked the door.

My mother visited me at a time that coincided with my delivery. At night, she went to bed, as did my husband. I did not tell them my belly

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[34] Locals greatly respected this *bla ma* from Khri ka County, who was often invited to local homes and communities after a death and associated religious rituals, and when a person was severely ill.

[35] Sku 'bum byams pa gling, a Tibetan monastery in Tsong kha (Huangzhong) County, was twenty-six kilometers from Zi ling (Nian and Bai 1993:39-45). Today, this monastery is in the administrative region of Zi ling City. See Smith (2017:224) for a photo of the monastery.

[36] A scripture often chanted in the hope of having a son.

[37] A small temple with a stupa built on the site of Rje tsong kha pa's (born in Tsong kha in 1357 and the founder of the Dge lugs School of Tibetan Buddhism) birthplace at the contemporary Sku 'bum Monastery.

was uncomfortable. The discomfort had started in the late afternoon. I feel comfortable and at ease when I am alone. I was unprepared for delivery, so when the labor pains subsided, I hurried outside to collect a full basin of soil and spread it on the floor near the adobe stove.

My mother noticed my movement and came to the door of my room several times, asking about my situation. I refused to let her in, insisting I was fine and showing no indication of discomfort. I don't know why, but I find other people's approaches irritating. I finally delivered a son, my third child, early in the morning. Shortly after birth, I asked my husband to get up and hand me the scissors and threads I had prepared and placed on a desk.

Not knowing that I had just given birth, he responded furiously, "Why are you waking me? I must get up early in the morning to work."

As soon as he heard the baby's screams, he sprang out of bed, ran to me, and complimented me. He was so delighted he could not locate the scissors and threads on the desk. He left after handing me the scissors and two threads. I put the infant between my outstretched legs in front of me and tied the cord on both sides, leaving two centimeters on the baby's and mother's sides.

After birth, my husband notified my mother. She hurriedly arrived and scolded me for not informing her during labor. Worse, she was enraged when she realized the baby had been born on the earthen floor without covering the floor with sheep dung powder to prevent blood discharge and afterbirth from contacting the earth. Locals often say this irritates certain spirits and adversely affects children, who might get pimples on their faces and cry. My mother buried the placenta deep under the ash accumulation from the adobe stove in a ditch near my house the next day.

After three days, I washed the baby with lukewarm water containing milk and pine needles.

After a few days of rest, I was expected to get up and resume housework. I washed my hands and face and burned incense to cleanse myself before doing chores.

My husband rarely cared for our children. I often carried my child on my back with a sash to do farm work and housework. Once the older siblings matured, they could alleviate my childcare burden.

After birth, I often woke up four to five times to breastfeed. I can't forget one evening just a few days after my second childbirth. My

drunken husband and some of his friends returned home around midnight, drank beer, and made a lot of noise while I was caring for my elder daughter and my regularly crying infant. Later, I was told to get up and prepare food for them. I did it while caring for my infant, or my husband would have been angry and beaten me.

My husband went to the local monastery to ask an older respected monk for a name for my child. The monk would write the name on a piece of paper. After seven days, my husband unfolded the paper with the name and said the name in the baby's ear three times in an undertone.

When a child cried a lot, I melted lead in a ladle and circled the child's head with the ladle to rid them of fear. I would also ask a *bla ma* or monk to divine. He usually suggested we chant certain scriptures, which was very useful. We changed the child's name if those methods didn't work. For example, my younger daughter often cried, especially at night. A tantric practitioner gave her a new name when religious rituals for her didn't work. She then became better.

From the second month, I fed my children wheat flour soup. I breastfed my children until they were at least one and a half years old. When it was time for my children to first consume meat, I fed goat's tongue to my sons, which locals often say helps the child become a good speaker. I gave rabbit meat to my daughters to help them become more intelligent.

The most common thing we used at that time for dealing with infants' urine and feces was the *tha khug*. Ash in the bag absorbed the infant's urine. When the baby defecated, I changed the cloth diaper, which is healthier than modern diapers.

We didn't have sanitary pads at that time. Women gradually used pieces of cloth when they wore pants. Soon after the placenta emerged, I sat and attached the warm placenta to my vagina to relieve the tearing pain, based on my mother-in-law's advice.

The placenta was retained, causing more agony after the birth of my third child. After a lengthy wait, an experienced Chinese woman from another village arrived and instructed me to lean against a bag of dry grass, roll her palm on my belly, and blow into an empty bottle. The placenta was then easily expelled. If not for her, I would not be alive at this moment.

The local custom is that the family should slaughter a sheep shortly after a woman gives birth so she can recuperate from physical fragility and have enough milk to breastfeed the newborn. Meat, mutton broth, and *rtsam pa* were the common foods I consumed after delivery. I avoided drinking and contact with cold water, commonly thought to lead to gynecological diseases and joint pain. But it was inevitable that I would come into contact with cold water, so now I have a sore back and arthritis. I think it is because I lacked rest after birth.

Women mostly went to their natal homes to give birth, but I didn't because my husband and I had a separate house, and no woman would replace me to do house chores, so I had to stay home.

ACCOUNT FOUR: SGROL MTSHO (B. 1968)

I was born in Bla brang[38] and raised by my aunt. My relatives arranged a marriage for me when I matured, but I fled. In 1990, I first met my current husband, who was with his friend in Bla brang. We planned to go to Lha sa, but we couldn't. Finally, we went to my husband's community, staying at his friend's house. His father was a local leader, and the family had a lot of sheep and goats. Once we arrived, the family welcomed us and slaughtered a sheep for us. My husband and I stayed there for several days, and I helped the family milk goats. I was initially surprised that goats' horns were tied together with rope for milking. I then imitated the women milking goats by stretching their hands between the goats' back legs to squeeze the teats.

My husband's brother-in-law arrived on horseback three days later with two more horses, two new robes, and silver adornments. A local woman helped me dress in both robes and wore silver adornments. As a newly arrived wife, local custom required that I wear new robes and adornments. Afterward, we mounted horses and rode to the summer pasture residence of my husband's family.

I began suffering physical discomfort and protracted headaches after a few months at the summer pasture. Finally, my husband and I rode horses to the township town hospital, where I was examined. I was told I was pregnant, which was the reason for the pain and discomfort.

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[38] Located in Bsang chu (Xiahe) County, Kan lho (Gannan) Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, Gansu Province.

During my pregnancy, I mostly stayed in the pastoral area but occasionally went to the farming area to do farm work. I herded sheep, spun yarn for weaving, and softened sheepskins. This was difficult for me in the beginning. I was most awkward using my hands to recoat *sgo ra*[39] with mud to improve its appearance. I couldn't coat it as smoothly as my mother-in-law. My handprints were conspicuous on the wall, which did not satisfy my mother-in-law, who scolded me for doing it poorly.

No one had told me about childbirth before my first delivery, so I knew nothing about it. I had a lot of fear the first time, but less during my second and third deliveries.

I felt ill during my first pregnancy's third trimester, so my father-in-law rode a mule to the township town to get Tibetan medicine from the only Tibetan doctor there.

My abdomen ached intermittently for twenty days before giving birth. There was no midwife, I was often in pain, and nobody knew when I would give birth. My firstborn was premature. My in-laws slept in a yak-hair tent, while my husband and I slept nearby in a modest adobe house. At night, when I was in pain, my spouse rubbed my back once in a while, which was the only thing he could do to alleviate my nightly discomfort and inability to sleep.

The persistent pain convinced my family I should visit the local township town hospital the next day. I was in excruciating pain and had to urinate frequently the night before. I had little choice but to lie and sometimes sit throughout the labor since I could not maintain any other position. My husband was used to hearing my constant wailing and lay half asleep. Occasionally, he asked whether he should massage me.

At midnight, while squeezing and enduring the pain, I sensed something come out of my body. My daughter was born without a cry. I couldn't see her since there was no light. I didn't dare check on her. The pain disappeared instantly. I told my husband, and he called my mother-in-law. Later, something else came out. I had no idea what it was and

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[39] According to Tshe gzung skyid, it is a wall built at the front of the black yak-hair tent in winter to keep out the cold wind. It was generally made with blocks of soil or sod blocks. The blocks were joined with dirt mixed with filtered horse dung. After three to four days, when the wall dried, women used their palms to coat the wall with clay. The wall reached the edge of the interior surface of the tent and had the same width as the front part of the tent. The center of the wall had a gap for people to move in and out. This gap was often covered with a cloth.

moved away from it. I was unsure of what to do. My mother-in-law arrived with a *ting pra* 'oil lamp'[40] and without a sash around her robe.

She examined the newborn under the dim light and worriedly said, "It's a girl. I'm not sure she will live."

She cut the umbilical cord and covered the newborn in lambskin. She was smaller than normal infants and couldn't nurse for some time.

I had no milk shortly after birth, so my mother-in-law obtained breast milk from her daughter, who was breastfeeding her one-year-old son. A little ball of wool was dipped in milk and squeezed into my infant's mouth.

Widows and women whose children had died were not allowed to be midwives. Unlike my first delivery, women helped me in my later deliveries. I delivered on the ground covered with powdered sheep dung and an old sheepskin in front of the adobe stove. I stayed on it for seven days after delivery. The placenta and other discharges went on the powder. The placenta was placed to one side, put in a bag with dung powder, and buried under ashes outside the house three to seven days later. It should be buried as deep as possible. Some children tend to vomit milk after breastfeeding, which is believed to be because the placenta is not buried deep enough.

The umbilical cord should be tied on both sides before being severed with scissors. It is risky if the mother's side is untied. This may cause excessive bleeding and inhibit the placenta from being expelled.

Once the placenta fell onto the dung powder after childbirth, I attached it to my vagina until it cooled to help me recover from vaginal tearing. I used a cloth as a sanitary pad.

Only family members could contact my infant and me for seven days after delivery. I resumed house chores ten days after delivery. For one month, I consumed no spices, no cold water, and very little salt, fearing this would harm my health and my nursing child.

During my third pregnancy, I collected firewood in a remote area when painful contractions began. I then quickly set out with my donkey loaded with the firewood I had gathered. On the way, when I had sharp pain, I sat on the ground and endured it as the donkey advanced. When the agony subsided, I hurried to catch up with the donkey.

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[40] *Ting pra* (CT). *Kar mye* (LT: *dkar me*) was also used. *Ting pra* refers to traditional lamps holding oil or melted fat that used cotton wicks.

My first two children were girls. The third was a boy. When my father-in-law knew it was a boy, he was excited, offered *bsang*, and blew a conch. My father-in-law's knowledgeable monk brother named all my children after seven days.

Children's hair is traditionally not trimmed until they reach the age of three. Two of my daughters were left with *ra ba* 'a tuft of hair braided into a little plait' symbolizing hope for a future sibling.

I used *tha khug* for the first two children but later used long fabric strips that were recycled as diapers. When the children were around fourteen months old, I bought pants with an open crotch made by a Chinese woman from the neighboring village, which helped them urinate easily.

When children cried a lot, we used *khrus chu* a tantric practitioner or *bla ma* had blown on to wash the baby and chanted scriptures assigned by a diviner.

ACCOUNT FIVE: BZANG MO (B. 1987)

I was born and raised in a black yak-hair tent and grew up with five siblings. I anticipated attending school, but my parents refused, insisting I tend goat kids and calves. My two younger brothers attended school but quit after elementary school. When I was thirteen, I began to tend my family's livestock alone on collective pastureland while my parents did agricultural work in the farming area. We often used a cart drawn by a donkey or mule to fetch water from a remote place with running water in the herding area.

When I became an adult, my father, who is skilled at making Tibetan clothing, offered to teach me how to make garments and robes so I could run a small Tibetan clothing business in the township town. I was uninterested and continued herding livestock, which I enjoyed.

I got married when I was twenty-seven. I have one child and look forward to having more children, but I can no longer become pregnant.

My mother gave birth in a black yak-hair tent, but I gave birth at a hospital in Mgo mang Township. I had two Ultrasound B tests during my pregnancy.

When I realized I was pregnant, my husband and I went to Bya khyung phag mo[41] at Bya khyung Monastery,[42] offered a *kha btag*s 'white silk scarf', one hundred RMB, and *snyan shal.*[43] We asked for prayers and blessings for my unborn child. My husband and I knelt in front of the Bya khyung phag mo image, which was covered with cloth in a glass enclosure, while the monk manager said prayers loudly for a few minutes. Later, in return, the monk gave us a piece of bread and a folded paper with two names, one for a girl and another for a boy, bound with a sacred red thread. I stored them in a case in a high space in our home shrine room.

An auspicious day was chosen after delivery. We unfolded the names paper and chose the girl's name for my daughter - 'Phag mo nor bu'. All the names given by Bya khyung phag mo are featured with the insertion of two syllables from the name-giver's name. After dipping the dried bread in hot water the same day, I ate it.

As my due date approached, I left my husband's home and returned to my natal home. Later, my mother and I leased a room near the hospital in the township town since my natal home was far from the hospital. We went there in advance to minimize health risks. We rushed to the hospital as labor started, and the water broke. My mother was not allowed in the delivery room. Soon after being attended by two nurses and a doctor, I gave birth to my daughter without much difficulty because I performed one hundred prostrations every day from the beginning of my pregnancy until the day of delivery. I felt safe with the physicians but timid and humiliated because it is culturally considered shameful to expose your vagina to anyone.

Today, we are fortunate to give birth in hospitals since we receive medication or IVs to prevent issues such as retained placenta or infection. I haven't had any gynecological health issues thus far, which I

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[41] Bya khyung rdo rje phag mo is a supreme being with the power to save infants from death. Locals often asked for protection from this being, especially when a woman had experienced a stillbirth, and prayed for blessings and protection for the next child. Meanwhile, before the pregnancy, people visited to pray for a son.

[42] According to Nian and Bai (1993:51), Bya khyung yon tan dar rgyas gling (Brag bya khyung/Bya khyung dgon pa) was located thirty-five kilometers in the west of Hualong Hui Autonomous County, on Bya khyung Mountain. It was founded by Chos rje don grub rin chen in 1349.

[43] A long strip of (yellow) fabric with patterns (dragons) offered to deities.

credit to the hospital delivery and the great care and rest I had after delivery. It costs 2,000 RMB with medical insurance. It is more expensive at hospitals located in major cities.

After three days of IVs at the hospital, I was discharged and spent one month at my natal home to rest and tend to my child while my mother and sister cared for me. I was very careful about my diet and health. I abstained from chili, garlic, spices, and cold water. I consumed black-sugar tea, *rtsam pa* soup, and mutton broth.

Doctors spoke Chinese to me during my delivery, which I couldn't understand, so they got angry and scolded me, making me feel bad. It wasn't easy if we didn't understand Chinese in the hospital. They scolded my mother when my baby was born for not buying a wash tub to wash the baby.

People offered fruits, mutton, and cash to the doctors to ensure a good attitude and treatment during delivery and other treatments. We didn't do that, and maybe that's why they had a negative attitude toward me.

Another negative thing about hospital delivery was cutting the vagina with scissors and later sewing it. Many women complained about this. We all prefer to deliver the babies naturally without cutting.

Nowadays, no woman in the local community gives birth at home due to accessible transportation and advanced medical care in towns. Many women feel it is safe to give birth in a hospital where there is support from medical professionals in case of infection, excessive bleeding, or retained placenta, which have caused the death of many women. Since around 2010, women have been required to give birth in a hospital, or the newborn won't be able to obtain a birth certificate for household registration, which may cause the child a lot of inconvenience.

On rare occasions, women who live in remote herding areas with geographical barriers accidentally have quick labor before they can reach a hospital. Women in the herding areas and those with heavy family burdens travel to the hospital only when labor begins. Conversely, women with formal education who work in urban areas are hospitalized in advance to wait for or induce labor. From the beginning of their pregnancies, some women receive routine hospital testing and participate in activities beneficial for giving birth. However, such examinations and activities are costly and less prevalent in the local

community. Locals seldom opt for an epidural while giving vaginal birth despite potential discomfort.

The last time I was weeding in the fields with some women, they described difficulties they encountered in the hospital - language and cultural challenges. One said, "Doctors spoke aggressively to me when I didn't understand what they said and scolded me for not preparing things that are needed for the baby and the mother."

The practice of resting after childbirth is prevalent today in our community. Unlike in the past, nearly all women rest after giving birth. In the case of a herding woman who is occupied with household chores and when no other women are available to replace her, she is unlikely to take a long rest after giving birth. Postpartum rest depends on family circumstances and lifestyle.

Once all the local women give birth in hospitals, some traditional childbirth practices will vanish. Fewer people are concerned with traditional beliefs, such as serious health risks stemming from where the amniotic fluid is discarded or the placenta is buried. However, some women said newborns have spots on their faces, are physically unwell, or often cry because they neglect the placenta or amniotic fluid in the hospital. Conventional solutions to the issue, such as providing *bsang* at the spot where the mother gave birth, are no longer possible. Even though some traditions are vanishing, some continue to play important roles, such as consulting *bla ma* for rituals that should be performed before childbirth to ensure the safety of the mother and child, naming, and childcare. Dietary restrictions after delivery are comparable to those in the past. For example, it is believed that spicy foods, garlic, seasonings, and cold drinks harm the health of nursing mothers and their infants. Aside from that, locals continue to slaughter sheep for recuperation following a birth.

Based on what I've heard and my experiences as a local resident, Cesarean sections are uncommon among local illiterate women. Instead, it is typical for approximately four out of ten educated women working in a local county, town, or city to have a C-section. Some do it to avoid labor contraction pain. Others do it because they believe that vaginal birth will lead to vaginal cuts or impairment.

Local women mostly consider C-sections negatively since they weaken women physically and lead to various health concerns afterward.

Consequently, they insist on vaginal delivery though it is time-consuming and difficult.

ACCOUNT SIX: DPA' MTSHO SKYID (B. 1993)

I was born and raised in my home community's herding area. I grew up herding goat kids and lambs. I had a chance to attend school at the age of nine. I graduated from Northwest Nationalities University and now work as a kindergarten teacher in Stong skor Community, [44] the herding community where my husband is from.

I delivered one child via Cesarean section in Khri ka County Hospital. I used pregnancy test papers to check whether I was pregnant. When positive, I went to the County Town Hospital for a B Ultrasound check. I visited obstetric doctors several times during my pregnancy for check-ups. During the third month, I had a four-dimensional fetus ultrasound, and the doctor reported all was good. Some women had monthly check-ups. I didn't because I have heard and believed that too many examinations are not good for the baby.

I prepared clothes, quilts, diapers, and feeding bottles for my baby during my pregnancy.

I didn't do work requiring much physical strength during my pregnancy because I live in a large family with my parents-in-law, who are still young, and my husband's brother and his wife. I was not needed for much physical work during my pregnancy. I helped cook, clean, and sometimes herded sheep in my family's fenced pastureland. I didn't need to care much about the sheep. My sister-in-law and I rented a room near the Jo khang Temple during my late pregnancy.[45] Every morning, I got up early to prostrate, circumambulate the religious assembly hall, and turn prayer wheels while chanting *Rje btsun sgrol ma*[46] and *Dmigs*

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[44] Part of Mgo mang Township, Mang ra County.

[45] Founded by Sa paN kun dga' rgyal mtshan in 1244, the Jo khang/Jo jo lha khang was located in Khri ka County (Nian and Bai 1993:185). See Smith (2017:65) for a photo.

[46] "Tara is a tantric meditation deity whose practice is used by practitioners of the Tibetan branch of Vajrayana Buddhism to develop certain inner qualities and understand outer, inner, and secret teachings about compassion and emptiness" (https://www.tibetanbuddhistencyclopedia.com/en/index.php?title=Tara, accessed 18 October 2022).

brtse ma[47] scriptures with my prayer beads every day. I also prayed to the Buddha to bless my baby and me during labor.

The doctor said the fetus lacked oxygen and recommended I breathe oxygen through an inhaler during my late pregnancy. I then inhaled oxygen for thirty minutes a day for about twenty days. I had delayed parturition, so the doctor asked me to take medication to induce delivery. I was hospitalized, had a complete physical examination, and took the prescribed drug. My labor contractions soon began. The intervals between contractions were long and continued for two days. The doctor advised me to have a Cesarean delivery because it was not good for the baby to wait longer. I agreed reluctantly.

It costs 4,500 RMB with medical insurance to have a Cesarean section at Khri ka County Town Hospital. Soon after delivery, my siblings and relatives from my husband's family visited. Each person gave me 20-300 RMB, baby clothes, and fruit as gifts. My close friends sent red packets of 50-200 RMB. It was reciprocal. They offered me gifts because I had gifted them when they gave birth.

I was allowed to leave the hospital after six days. The doctor had said I should rest for three months, but I rested for fifty days and gradually did some housework. I avoided consuming cold drinks and spicy food. Forty days after delivery, I had a physical check-up, and the doctor said the wound had recovered well.

The doctor said it was dangerous to become pregnant again soon after a C-section delivery, so it was suggested I not become pregnant for two to three years. Three months after the delivery, I went to the hospital for a contraceptive ring.

I used commercial diapers for my baby but tried not to use too many because local women said wearing diapers frequently was detrimental to the baby's reproductive organs. That might be true because my daughter's vagina and the surrounding skin became red and seemed painful. I put her in diapers at night and when we left our home. In the daytime, I dressed her in open-crotch pants.

The first day after the C-section, the doctor ordered me not to consume any food. On the second day, I had a little porridge. Gradually, I had chicken broth, yak bone soup, eggs, and sometimes vegetables to

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[47] "Aming at loving kindness, a prayer to Tsong kha pa" (https://tibetanbuddhistencyclopedia.com/en/index.php?title=Dmigs_brtse_ma, accessed 18 October 2022).

stay well nourished. My family also slaughtered a sheep and gave me blood sausages. My sister gave me a small bag of crushed *zwa khyig* 'nettles' and said it could help discharge bad things from the uterus, so I drank some of this after it was boiled with milk tea.

I breastfed my daughter until she was six months old. I offered wheat flour soup from the second month since my breastmilk was insufficient. After weaning, I fed her milk diluted with water in a feeding bottle. I tried to add less milk since too much milk made her constipated, and then I used enemas or drugs to help her defecate. I introduced adult food in the fifth month and gradually increased the amount.

Today, there is an emerging phenomenon of young mothers having less breast milk than their mothers. Local women explain this as the result of consuming various carbonated beverages and junk food containing chemical additives. Besides, some young mothers try not to breastfeed their babies because it makes their breasts droop.

CONCLUSION

The cultural and religious practices and beliefs about childbirth described in this essay typify Bon skor Community. However, some details are not necessarily consistent with every family's custom. Families have different perspectives and conditions on, for instance, dietary restrictions, divinations during pregnancy, and postnatal care.

Many customs and practices associated with childbirth are disappearing as women increasingly give birth in hospitals. Divination continues to play a pivotal role in modern society. A diviner or *bla ma* is consulted to learn the hospital the expectant mother should go to for childbirth and what religious rituals should be done for the safety of the mother and the infant.

Giving birth in hospitals has prevented the death of many women from retained placenta, infection, and excessive bleeding after childbirth, which were huge concerns for women in the past.

Today, all local women give birth at a hospital. This has become compulsory due to concerns about the risks of home labor and the need to obtain a birth certificate for family registration. Moreover, widespread hospital delivery has persuaded locals to go to healthcare centers even though some have economic barriers. Being an exception would precipitate negative reactions or gossip. For

example, the family is mean, stingy, and does not care about the daughter-in-law's health.

According to my consultants, vaginal delivery at a local county town hospital cost around 4,000 RMB, half of which is covered by medical insurance. C-section costs 8,500RMB in total, of which the family should pay 4,500. The rest is covered by medical insurance. Real costs vary based on the woman's health condition. If unfavorable, she may be asked to transfer to a provincial hospital, where expenses are often higher because of the advanced medical facilities and more highly specialized medical workers.

Furthermore, it is inevitable for local people to encounter language barriers since medical workers are Chinese and only speak Chinese, while many local people are illiterate and don't know Chinese. This creates challenges for locals in communicating the patient's situation. There are also cultural barriers regarding diet and caring for the baby. Locals mainly consume barley flour instead of vegetables, porridge, and vegetables, as suggested by doctors. Local women tend to sleep with their babies, but doctors recommend sleeping separately.

Young generations rarely know how their previous generations gave birth, preferring contemporary childbirth practices they consider safer and more hygienic. C-sections are increasingly common among young women, partly because they believe vaginal delivery leads to vaginal cuts and impairments. Moreover, young mothers rarely breastfeed their children since some lack breast milk while some are concerned about the beauty of breast shape. Mothers increasingly feed their babies milk powder and cow or yak milk.

HEAVY KARMIC DEBTS: TIBETAN MENSTRUATION EXPERIENCES, PERCEPTIONS, AND ATTITUDES[48]

Menarche is the first menstrual period in a female adolescent. It typically occurs between the ages of ten and sixteen, with an average onset age of 12.4 years. The onset of menarche is determined by socioeconomic conditions, genetics, general health, nutritional status, and family size.[49] Beyond its biological significance, menarche holds profound cultural weight within Tibetan society, shaping notions of femininity and womanhood across generations.

Menstruation, commonly known as periods, is the natural process in which the uterus sheds its lining, including blood, mucus, and cellular debris, through the vagina, typically lasting for three to seven days. The menstrual cycle prepares the female body for the possibility of pregnancy. When pregnancy does not occur, hormones instruct the uterus to release its lining, leading to periods. The cycle repeats after a period begins.[50]

In remote rural areas of northwestern China, Tibetan women have untold stories and intimate experiences of menstruation, a narrative often shrouded in silence. This paper ventures into this realm, delving into the menstrual journeys of five Tibetan women. Through their accounts, we journey through time, exploring the evolution of attitudes and practices surrounding menstruation within their complex cultural and socioeconomic contexts.

These five women, born and raised locally, offer more than personal stories. They serve as torchbearers for their female predecessors, amplifying the voices and predicaments regarding the

[48] I sincerely thank the multiple reviewers and editors who helped improve this chapter. An earlier version may be found at https://zenodo.org/records/13953627, accessed 16 January 2025.
[49] See Lacroix, et al. (2023).
[50] Better Health Channel (2024). https://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/health/conditionsandtreatments/menstrual-cycle, accessed 20 October 2023.

menstruation of generations past. Growing up herding livestock (sheep, goats, cows) and cultivating wheat, barley, and canola, they were immersed in the rhythms of rural life, where access to formal education was a distant dream, and literacy remained out of reach.

Within these narratives lie echoes of resilience and adaptation as women navigate the ebb and flow of menstruation amidst changing tides of modernity. Their stories mirror the broader societal shifts within Tibetan communities, from the scarcity of period products to the gradual embrace of female hygiene products in the late twentieth century.

In the following pages, we share personal stories, cultural views, and historical background to highlight the different menstrual experiences of women in Tibetan culture. By seeing through their eyes, we can better understand the importance of menstruation in the past, present, and future, celebrating the quiet rhythms that are a key part of womanhood.

METHODOLOGY AND ETHICS

From February to July 2023, semi-structured interviews were conducted with women who were willing to share their experiences of menstruation and their first-hand accounts of living during a time when menstrual products were in short supply.

Not all women were prepared to speak openly on this topic. For example, a woman (b. 1948) whom I consulted laughed uncomfortably. She was unwilling to speak openly about her menstrual experience, declaring there was nothing special about it, and that it was shameful to discuss such a private matter. She emphasized women who discussed menstruation in public were once believed to have mental problems. She was unsure if young people talking more openly about menstruation was positive.

The interviews were conducted voluntarily, with participants making informed decisions about their involvement. Before the interviews, each participant was approached and asked if they wished to be interviewed and if they consented to include their original voices. All participants agreed, and this consent was audio-recorded as an additional measure.

Throughout the interview process, great care was taken to ensure no pressure was exerted on the participants. The interviews were conducted in a respectful and non-coercive manner.

Written consent forms were not feasible due to the participants' illiteracy. However, verbal consent was obtained and recorded. Participants were assured that their real names would not be disclosed to protect sensitive information and personal privacy. Instead, only their birth years were provided to maintain anonymity and shield them from potential stigma.

Furthermore, participants were informed that the audio recordings would be securely stored on the author's phone, protected by security passwords. They were assured that access to these recordings would be restricted to the author alone.

As a community member, the author and the participants established a preexisting level of trust, further ensuring the confidentiality and integrity of the interview process.

Each woman was interviewed using a set of questions and encouraged to express themselves freely. Each interview took forty to fifty minutes and was conducted entirely in A mdo Tibetan dialect. All the conversations were audio-recorded on a cellphone and later translated and analyzed in English by the author. After transcribing each interviewee's account from the audio recording, some repetitive information was omitted, but the essence of their accounts was captured. Furthermore, their words were organized based on relevance rather than the sequence of the questions.

Additionally, I drew some conclusions based on my personal experience in the discussion section. Born and raised in the local community, I have developed a long-term relationship with residents and gained rich insights into their lifestyle, social structure, and changes. From primary to high school, my education in local boarding schools allowed me to interact with Tibetan students from herding and farming backgrounds. I witnessed the challenges schoolgirls face regarding reproductive health, menarche, and menstruation. I understand the landscape of girls' reproductive health education in local schools and teachers' attitudes. Consequently, I have the credibility to present and analyze the experiences of these five female consultants.

LITERATURE REVIEW[51]

The start of menstruation signals new challenges for many adolescent girls, experiencing stigma, harassment, and social exclusion during this time.[52] Schwab and Melendez-Torres (2019) reported that the lack of resources and sociocultural factors contribute to negative menstrual experiences, impacting the physical and psychological health, education, employment, and social participation of girls and women. Dinta Suresh (2023) highlighted the need for boys' and men's engagement in Menstrual Hygiene Management (MHM), which can substantially decrease the shame and stigma attached to menstruation confronted by their female peers and helps address deep-rooted gender equality. Furthermore, involving men and boys in ongoing conversations about menstruation and providing them with accurate information helps dispel misconceptions, fostering an environment free from mockery and shaming of menstruating girls (UNICEF, 2022).

Literature about Tibetan women's menstrual experiences is limited. On 10 June 2024, a search for 'Tibetan menstruation' on Google Scholar returned 13,600 results. Overall, findings fall into three categories: perceptions about menstruation, traditional medical treatment for menstrual ailments, and the onset age for menarche among girls.

The early Tibetan physician, G.yu thog yon tan mgon po[53] (2006 [1982]:371), attributed the existence of womanhood to *bsod*

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[51] Keywords including *menstruation*, *menarche*, and *Tibetan women* were used to search literature in English, Tibetan, and Chinese on https://scholar.google.com, https://xueshu.baidu.com, https://www.cnki.net, https://library.bdrc.io, https://www.nstl.gov.cn, and https://www.tandfonline.com/journals/tchs20.

[52] https://www.unicef.org/wash/menstrual-hygiene

[53] "The twelfth century physician, scholar and religious figure Yutok Yonten Gonpo the Younger (g.yu thog gsar ma yon tan mgon po) is often lauded as the "Father of Tibetan medicine." The Tibetan medical tradition often portrays Yutok as an emanation of the Medicine Buddha Bhaiṣajyaguru and as a descendant and reincarnation of Yutok Yonten Gonbo the Elder (g.yu thog rnying ma yon tan mgon po, 708-833), the royal physician of Tri Songdetsen (khri srong lde btsan, 742–797), who, according to legend, synthesized all the medical knowledge available in

nams dman pa 'low merit'. He regarded *zla mtshan* 'menstruation', *nu ma'* breasts', and the *mngal* 'uterus' as special characteristics of the female anatomy. He also attributed some women's ailments to *skye ba dman* 'inferior birth' of the female body.

Relatedly, McGranahan (2010) points out that menstrual blood, as well as blood from childbirth or miscarriage, are deemed especially impure, e.g., menstruating women are prohibited from entering sacred locales. Spafford (2015) similarly notes the reluctance of Tibetan women to enter religious sites during their menstrual cycle in fear of religious transgression. Interviews from research on the current topic reflect these findings, with Lha mtsho and 'Brug skyid stating that menstruation is polluting. Although not perceiving themselves as inferior to men due to menstruation, they acknowledge their reduced social position in comparison to their male counterparts.

Tibetan medical literature underscores the significance of menstruation with Jiao et al.'s (2022) comparative study of herbal remedies used for menstrual disorders in various regions. Their research reveals that Tibetan women commonly use the entire *Cirsium souliei* (Franch.) Mattf. plant [54] for heavy or prolonged bleeding (menorrhagia) and the aerial portion of *Lagotis brevituba* Maxim[55] for menstrual regularity. Qi et al.'s (2018) study of herbal remedies identified the application of *Carthamus tinctorius*, [56] a common herbal remedy in Tibetan regions, for addressing dysmenorrhea and amenorrhea in local clinics. Bright (2012) explored more broadly the convergence of biomedicine, cultural

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Tibet in his day" https://treasuryoflives.org/biographies/view/Yutok-Yonten-Gonpo/P3005, accessed 18 September 2023.

[54] A stemless, perennial herb growing on forest margins, roadsides, fallow fields, flooded lands, fields, and moist places by water at 1,900-4,800 m in Kan su'u (Gansu), Ningxia, Mtsho sngon (Qinghai), Zi khron (Sichuan), and Dbus gtsang (Xizang) http://www.efloras.org/florataxon.aspx?flora_id=2&taxon_id=200023695, accessed 10 September 2023.

[55] The native range of this species is eastern Mtsho sngon to southwest Kan su'u. This perennial grows in subalpine and subarctic biomes https://powo.science.kew.org/taxon/urn:lsid:ipni.org:names:813199-1, accessed 10 September 2023.

[56] *Gur kum* (Tibetan name), *honghua* (Chinese name), safflower, a commonly used herbal medicine.

notions, and religious perceptions of women and gender in modern Tibetan medical texts regarding menstruation.

Several studies sought to pinpoint the typical age at which Tibetan girls experience menarche. Dpal bzang rgyal mtsho (2010) found girls typically commence menstruation between the ages of twelve to fifteen, often preceded by symptoms such as physical frailty, fatigue, back and abdominal pain, and breast swelling. Precautions during this phase are also presented. Zhang et al. (1984) reported the average age to be 16.84 and drew parallels with the menstrual patterns of women across multiple ethnic groups in China. Xiao et al. (2008) presented variances in the onset of menarche between urban and rural Tibetan girls, citing the age of menarche in Lha sa (Lasa) as 13.63 while the rural average of Nag chu (Naqu) was 13.70. Additionally, they identified seasonal surges in menarche during summer and autumn.

According to Meng et al. (2014:7), the average age of menarche among tertiary education female students in the Tibetan Autonomous Region (TAR, Xizang) was 13.5, with a dysmenorrhea occurrence rate of 71.5%, underscoring the lack of accessible menstrual education. Furthermore, Zouqiang (1996) associated the earlier onset of menarche in Lha sa with the regional economy, cultural influences, living standards, nutritional intake, and overall health conditions.

In summary, the modest amount of literature reviewed has broadly addressed perceptions around the menstrual cycle among Tibetan women and traditional herbal remedies for menstrual disorders. A few studies have delved into the onset of menarche and variances in age onset due to young women's geographic, economic, and nutritional status. One author encapsulates the convergence of biomedicine, cultural notions, and religious perceptions about menstruation in a modern Tibetan medical textbook.

INTERVIEWS

LHA MTSHO (B. 1960, 63 YEARS OLD)

I was fifteen and weeding in the field. I observed blood when I urinated near the field and panicked, convinced that something was very wrong with me. Worried and terrified, I hurried home to see my mother. I

couldn't help sobbing as I described the incident. She said it was normal for girls and tried to calm me. I couldn't believe this and rolled frantically on the ground. I frequently urinated to check whether there was blood. It drove me crazy when there was blood. I was agitated and couldn't sleep at night when I was menstruating. I couldn't accept it until I was older, and even then, psychological acceptance took a long time.

I had noticed menstrual blood inside women's robes and on their legs before my menarche, but I didn't expect the same would happen to me. Slowly, I realized that all women had this experience and encountered difficulties dealing with menstrual blood because of a lack of menstrual hygiene products.

No one told me that I would menstruate before my first period. My mother was the only one I talked with about my menarche. Telling others about my periods would have been humiliating since no one discussed this publicly. I tried not to reveal I was menstruating during my periods.

I didn't know women experienced menstruation until I became an adult and gave birth. No one told me this before.

It's distressing and pitiful to recall local women's experience with menstruation without sanitary pads or underwear, especially compared to women today. It was common for women to spot the felt on the adobe stove, their trousers, and robes. Letting menstrual blood flow into a pair of trousers was the best option. Nevertheless, we didn't think we were unlucky or poor. Instead, we thought we were beautiful, living a good life, and satisfied. Women nowadays are lucky to have access to various disposable sanitary napkins and underwear that can be changed daily. We didn't dream of such things in our time.

During communal work or gatherings, a menstruating woman often asked for assistance from other women to see if her trousers were spotted with menstrual blood to avoid embarrassment. We didn't care much when the people around us were all females. Young women were shyer and more careful than older women.

There were cases in which local men enjoyed discussing women's menstrual discharge on their beds. Also, discussing this was not exceptional among women.

Once, when I was on my way home from fetching water, a car passed me, throwing out packs of menstrual paper. I had never seen this before and didn't know what it was for. Thinking it was good for wrapping

medicines, I gave it to a local Tibetan doctor, who was pleased. Later, when I was around twenty, I realized that paper was for menstruation.

Later, we had access to long and wide menstrual papers. Unlike modern sanitary pads that can be used directly, we needed to fold them into a pad. They were better than cloth, but the problem was we didn't have underwear, hindering the effective use of menstrual pads. For example, many times, we were ridiculed when menstrual pads fell to the ground through our loose trousers.

We had trousers, but my older generations didn't. They wore Tibetan robes daily. Elders would say young women were lucky because we had trousers, so our robes wouldn't be stained.

Previously, local women did not refer to menstruation as *zla mtshan/grang gzhi*, which is what we call it now. Instead, we called it *gos rdzod* 'something that spoils fabric'.

I buried the sanitary pads under ash because some say menstrual discharge can't be shown to the sky.

Women used to blame menstruation for staining their beautiful Tibetan robes, especially when participating in wedding ceremonies. We often complained about having to menstruate and admired men whose lives were free from this.

We didn't understand menstruation correctly. I thought menstruation was shameful and should be hidden. But I don't think that way now because it's not bad, like stealing or harming others. It is a natural experience for women. Perhaps today's tendency to discuss menstruation openly has influenced me. Young generations are now educated and understand what is shameful. Doctors are also educating women about menstruation.

To some extent, local women have been publicly discussing menstruation among themselves. For example, if we were outside and a woman had her period, she would ask for a sanitary pad from other women without hesitation. This was unthinkable years ago.

Because of my traumatic menarche experience, teaching girls about menstruation at school would be good. Otherwise, they might suffer mental turmoil.

I told my daughter about menstruation, telling her not to be scared. Once, she came home from school and asked for a cup of tea with brown sugar. I was puzzled and asked why. She said, "Girls drink

brown tea with brown sugar at school when menstruating. They said it could stop the menstrual blood."

Girls had periods for a few days and then stopped, so they thought it was because of the brown sugar tea.

When I was in my early thirties, some women said that there was underwear that could help prevent your menstrual paper from falling. That was true. Later, we could purchase these from our local township town, which made things much more convenient. We had to wear one pair of briefs for a long time because, unlike today, we didn't have others to change into.

One time, some local women went for a free physical check at the township center, and a doctor told us to wear underwear and wash and dry it in the sun. We were also told the importance of changing underwear frequently for hygiene. This was unrealistic for us, and we criticized the doctor's advice on our way back: "Ridiculous! How is it possible to change underwear regularly? Who has that many pairs of underwear?"

Everyone agreed, and some said, "What if others see us washing our underwear?"

We only talked about menstruation with women we were close to. If a woman had severe abdominal pain during menstruation, she wouldn't admit it, even if a doctor asked. The same was true for me. Everything related to menstruation was hidden.

We did all the usual chores during our periods. For example, our feet might have been immersed in cold water all night or all day when we irrigated fields. We didn't know that it impacted our health until later when hospitals were easily accessible.

I heard women say a pregnant woman will not menstruate. Besides, they often say that when a woman resumes her period a few months after childbirth, there is the possibility of becoming pregnant. If she doesn't menstruate for a year or so, she won't become pregnant during that time.

In the past, locals believed there was a connection between menarche and sexuality. It was thought girls began menstruating when they had sex with men. When a young girl menstruates, locals tend to gossip she must have had sex at a young age. People also would talk about girls' sexuality based on the size of their breasts. If a girl has bigger breasts, they believe she is sexually active.

There are no regulations on women practicing religious rituals during their periods. Nevertheless, some local women resist going to religious assembly halls or practicing religious rituals such as fasting during menstruation. Menses have a bad, polluting odor, so avoiding approaching sacred places during menstrual periods is good.

It is obvious that women have lower social positions than men, but menstruation is not what makes us inferior.

MKHA' 'GRO SKYID (B. 1963, 60 YEARS OLD)

It was common for local women to have premarital sex.

I had my menarche around fifteen but told no one, not even my mother and sisters. Before my menarche, my mother told me to be careful and emphasized that having sex would lead to menstruation.

We wore Tibetan robes. Menses stained our robes because we didn't have trousers or menstrual pads. Those products might have been available elsewhere, but we were in remote areas and couldn't go to places with a market. My first visit to the local township center was when I was around thirty.

We did usual work during our periods, including fetching water, collecting firewood and cow dung, driving livestock to water, crossing rivers barefoot, working in fields, etc. Consequently, my female contemporaries now have health problems such as backaches and joint pains. All these issues were caused by overwork in the past, especially during our periods.

I was worried during my menarche and hid everything about it from others. I thought I should be ashamed since no one discussed it publicly.

Once, I had an irregular period and was too ashamed to tell anyone, including a male Tibetan doctor. I was too embarrassed to talk about my symptoms and the amount of my menses unless the doctor asked. He mostly took my pulse and prescribed Tibetan medicine. Once I had an IV for an irregular menstrual discharge.

As I grew older, I gradually consulted a close sister about my menstrual problem, but no one else.

As a child, I saw my mother's and other women's robes stained on the inside with menstrual blood. I initially felt curious and scared, but I became accustomed to it later. My mother often told me not to carelessly place her robe inside out where others might see it.

Women never talked about menstruation publicly. Locals thought a person who did this was mentally ill. Young generations talk about menstruation publicly today. I think it's fine if they don't discuss it in the presence of male relatives. Children now go to official schools and don't know what they shouldn't talk about. Thus, there are cases when young girls speak about menstruation in the presence of their fathers, which is mortifying.

When you compare our menstrual experience with that of contemporary women, we experienced much more difficulty dealing with it, but we didn't think it was hard at that time. It seemed normal.

Unlike my mother, I talked about menstruation with my daughter. I told her not to be afraid and worried when having her menarche. Girls must be educated about menstruation before it begins. Otherwise, they may have many emotional and mental challenges.

We should take menstruation seriously since it can signal serious health issues. For example, one of my female relatives had a lot of bleeding, considered it shameful, and hid it. Finally, when it worsened, family members became aware of this and took her to the hospital, but it was too late, and she died.

RTA MGRIN (B. 1968, 55 YEARS OLD)

My menarche at fifteen was an unhappy, ill-fated experience. I didn't know about menstruation and that all women menstruate. I did not know the differences in the reproductive systems of men and women nor the relationship between menstruation and pregnancy for a long time after I experienced menarche. I had never heard anyone discuss it, and I had never been told about it. As a result, I was scared and shocked when I menstruated the first time.

Our female predecessors wore Tibetan robes and used no period products. Conversely, we wore trousers and used pieces of cloth to deal with menstrual blood. Since there was no underwear, the typical practice was to use a strip of cloth as a waistband and fasten a cloth pad to it. Fabric was relatively scarce, so we used a piece of cloth for a day. I was often anxious that I would be humiliated by others seeing my menstrual blood.

Zla mtshan and *sked pa* are common terms for menstruation. *Zla mtshan* is disturbing and troubling, but it's also good because doctors say unclean things are discharged from the uterus.

Locals used to say that menstrual blood-stained cloth shouldn't be thrown anywhere because it would offend *klu*,[57] so we were careful. Used menstrual material was often buried deep underground or in ash. Locals tend to say that being born as a man is *bsod nams che* 'great merit' while born as a woman is of *bsod nams chung* 'less merit' and heavy *lan chag*s 'karmic debts from past action'. Women had to experience menstruation, pregnancy, and childbirth because of these 'karmic debts'. As I grew older, I admired men's lives and understood the difference between men and women.

Locals used to say sexual experience determined the onset of menstruation, which was untrue. Because of that idea, locals were generally surprised to learn a teenage girl menstruated early, gossiped about her sexual experiences, and generally denigrated her. This might be why girls kept their menarche secret, viewing it as shameful and wanting to prevent unnecessary criticism and denigration from parents.

Now, everything has changed. Girls and women don't consider menstruation as shameful as they did in the past. Mothers tell their daughters what they know about menstruation. It's no longer a secret. It's increasingly an open topic among women but not among men, especially not with male relatives.

Similarly, I no longer consider menstruation shameful. We should not keep it a secret because it is natural for all women. We did nothing wrong to cause menstruation. Girls previously suffered from fear and shyness because of menstruation. This situation is better now. Teenage girls receive information at school about menstruation and physical reproduction. Doctors also advise local women on health care, which is extremely good.

In terms of restrictions during the menstrual period, sex is believed to be inappropriate as it might cause gynecological diseases. In addition, cold water and heavy physical labor are detrimental to our health during this time. However, these beliefs did not exist in the past,

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[57] *Klu* 'naga' are serpent spirits classified as one of the eight classes of gods and demons, or as animals or demi-gods. They live beneath the earth's surface or in water, trees, or rocks, and are believed to have magical powers and wealth. They are responsible for certain illnesses transmitted to humans (https://www.rigpawiki.org/index.php?title=Naga, 10 September 2023).

and I didn't care. My finger joints are all swollen now because I frequently encountered cold water.

In my late twenties, packets of sanitary towels costing 0.5 RMB became locally available. However, underwear wasn't available until some years after the arrival of towels. We needed underwear to use the sanitary paper effectively. Because of financial difficulty, we used a packet of sanitary papers for a long time and couldn't change the pads as frequently as women do now. There are now many choices for sanitary pads. For example, ones with an adhesive back to keep the pad in place and cotton surfaces, which girls prefer. However, most older women prefer traditional sanitary paper, which they fold into pads. They think modern pads have too much plastic and are bad for their health.

I used to see women wearing two to three pairs of trousers together during their periods. I couldn't do that because I only had one pair of trousers. Trousers were rarely washed because of limited tap water. Instead, trousers were dried in the sunshine, beaten with sticks, or kneaded with the hands to clean them. All trousers were black and dark blue then, which concealed menstrual blood.

Today's unpleasant situation is that some women don't care where they discard their used sanitary pads. Recently, when community members collectively picked up garbage to clean the environment, we found sanitary towels everywhere, which was disgusting. All the women strongly criticized those who were so careless. In the past, women had to be careful with their menstrual blood, but now they are too careless, which is not good.

I didn't have any pain during my periods. One problem I had was that after having a contraceptive ring fitted at the hospital, the doctor told me to rest and avoid heavy labor for some time. I ignored this and carried a heavy bag on my back, which caused discomfort in my abdomen and profuse bleeding. I returned to the hospital, and the doctor solved my problem by prescribing medicine.

Women hid everything, including menorrhagia, which was thick, whitish, and yellowish or greenish vaginal discharge (leucorrhea) in the past. This resulted in death in some cases. Teenage girls were shy and too embarrassed to discuss menstruation, while older women didn't care much and chatted about it openly among their intimate friends.

LHA SKYID RGYAL (B. 1970, 53 YEARS OLD)

No one told me about menstruation when I was a young girl. As a result, I felt overwhelmed and scared when I experienced my menarche at thirteen. I wore pants and used a piece of cloth as a menstrual pad.

At that time, locals said a girl wouldn't menstruate unless she had had sex with men. That wasn't true for me, but I hid everything about menstruation from others for fear that others might humiliate me about the onset of menstruation at an early age.

I used a piece of cloth many times. It was difficult for a young girl. We fastened the cloth menstrual pad to a cloth strip we used as a belt. There was no underwear. Later, we could buy sanitary pads in the local township town.

Nobody discussed menstruation publicly, but I noticed older women's menstrual discharge inside their robes.

I often think women's lives are tough because of menstruation and childbirth. I wish to be a male in my next life.

I now feel pity about my menstrual experience, which caused a lot of mental stress and physical discomfort.

People used to regard the menstrual period as shameful, but now young people talk about it openly without shame or hesitation. Some traditional women remain careful about discussing it and are uncomfortable with open discussion. I also think it's not good to talk about menstruation excessively in daily life. We must choose the appropriate time and occasion to talk about it. The topic of menstruation is something we should still be modest about in certain situations, for example, in the presence of men and especially male relatives. We should not reveal issues about our menstrual discharge to others.

There were many embarrassing moments before we had menstrual products. Women accidentally exposed their menses on their robes or pants. In that case, we would often inform the woman so that she could take care of it; otherwise, men would humiliate her.

I strongly advocate schools educating girls about menstruation because it's good for their physical and mental health.

We didn't have specialized doctors, and women didn't have as many health problems as they seem to have now. Or maybe women in the past hid their physical discomfort.

A few years ago, I consulted a doctor in a Tibetan hospital about having abdominal pain and irregular bleeding during my period. I stayed there for a week until I recovered.

Women used to hide their menstrual issues, which led to severe, even deadly gynecological diseases. It's important to tell doctors your issues and not be shy.

Some local individuals believe menstrual blood is impure and may emit an unpleasant odor, potentially contaminating religious images or the shrine room during the period. I heard menstrual blood during menarche was considered precious and had applications in medicine. I'm curious if there is any truth to this.

Some women choose not to visit religious sites, including their family's shrine room, during menstruation due to a belief that it is impure. I hadn't encountered this perspective before, but it does make me hesitate to visit religious sites during my periods.

'BRUG SKYID (B. 1972, 51 YEARS OLD)

I first menstruated at thirteen. I was scared and anxious but gradually calmed and accepted it since I had seen older women's menstrual blood inside their robes. I didn't tell anyone, not even my mother and sisters, because I had never heard them say anything about menstruation. No one told me that I would menstruate at a certain age. I thought menstruation was a forbidden topic, something to be ashamed of, and inappropriate to tell others. I tried to hide everything related to menstruation from others, even though sometimes I experienced uncomfortable abdominal or backaches during my periods. I kept this all to myself.

We lacked access to underwear or feminine hygiene products such as sanitary pads. Menstrual discharge flowed into our trousers during our periods. I sometimes used a piece of cloth as a menstrual pad. I wore two or three trousers together to keep the menses from seeping out if there was no fabric. We used to make the pants ourselves. My mother would cut a pants pattern, and I sewed them while herding.

Instead of throwing away cloths used as pads, I buried them under the ground or in ash to prevent others from seeing blood-stained pads around my house and spreading rumors.

I felt extremely ashamed and awkward about exposing menses on my trousers, but sometimes it was inevitable. Also, there were

embarrassing moments when other women spotted the pants or accidentally stained the rug where they sat.

Locals considered girls' menstruation would occur only after their first sexual intercourse. Consequently, if girls began menstruating at an early age and locals discovered this, especially women would gossip that so-and-so family's girl must have had sex.

Unlike today, we didn't have much time to rest during our periods. I married when I was seventeen and moved into my husband's home. My daily routine was house chores, raising children, and herding livestock. The workload did not change to allow a break during my period. Sometimes, I felt exhausted and suffered backaches, but I could not escape work. Also, we didn't pay special attention to food or drinks during our menstrual cycle, unlike girls today who avoid drinking cold water and consuming spicy food. We drank cold water and dipped our feet into rivers when herding livestock.

I didn't consult anybody when I had physical discomforts from menstruation. I thought it was shameful to let others know about my periods. Local women rarely see a doctor unless the symptoms are severe and virtually unbearable. Once, I didn't menstruate for a long time, so I went to the local township town for medication. I was eventually given an IV, and my menstruation resumed.

I didn't know women experienced such a thing as a menstrual cycle, and I did not know about the connection between menstruation and pregnancy until I had my first child.

Now, if I recall my menstrual experiences and compare them to the experiences of women today, our generation faced many challenges in dealing with menstruation. Our experiences were very harsh due to a lack of menstrual products and very little knowledge. Everything has changed. Women no longer encounter the challenges we had to face.

We imitated older women who considered menstruation to be shameful and dirty. Similarly, I did not tell my daughters about menstruation, nor did they ask about it. Young people and doctors are increasingly discussing menstruation publicly today and sharing relevant information and knowledge with rural women. This has helped me realize its importance and changed my conservative attitudes about menstruation.

We shouldn't be ashamed to discuss this aspect of women's experience - menstruation. It is undoubtedly a part of women's health,

and if we don't talk about it, many won't know how to deal with it properly. Our outdated attitudes toward menstruation have compromised women's general health and put them at risk. Women's lack of knowledge about menstruation and reluctance to talk about their physical discomforts and symptoms with families or doctors caused so many tragedies. Some women around me even died. We shouldn't feel intimidated and shy to discuss menstruation as we used to.

I now often tell my ten-year-old granddaughter about menstruation by saying, "You will menstruate. There is nothing about it that should shock you or make you ashamed. It's normal for all females."

I tell her this, fearing she might conceal it as I did and feel stressed. It is beneficial to tell young girls about menstruation while they're at school to reduce their fear and anxiety when it happens. Still, I have never heard of a teacher educating young girls about menstruation at school.

There is the idea among some locals that menstruation is sinful and polluting when practicing fasting rituals or entering a religious assembly hall. Some women observe these ideas while others don't.

Menstruation is innately polluting because of its offensive odor from the unclean things removed from the uterus. It's natural for women to have a period, and women are not inferior to men because of it.

DISCUSSION

The lived experiences of these five local women have allowed us to better understand their perspectives and practices around menstruation within their traditional society. Their poignant narratives illuminate local women's challenging journeys, providing glimpses into the lives of their female forebears, clothed in traditional Tibetan robes, in their daily lives without feminine hygiene products.

Their transitions through menstruation, in the context of both traditional and contemporary society, distinguished their experiences from those of their female predecessors.

EVOLUTION OF CULTURAL PERCEPTIONS ON MENSTRUATION

Local women's attitudes towards menstruation have progressively changed, and they now increasingly believe menstruation is not

something to hide and to be ashamed of. Several factors affect local women's attitudes. First, access to modern transportation services has allowed local women to visit hospitals and access modern medical care. Second, frequent visits to local township towns where they interact with Chinese merchants and people from different cultures. Third, the nine-year compulsory education policy compels sending children to school, where they obtain new information related to menstruation from teachers and students, which makes the topic of menstruation an open discourse. Fourth, social media allows local illiterate women to gain information about menstruation and reproductive health. All these factors gradually influence their ideas and behaviors regarding menstruation.

Importance of Education on Reproductive Health

All five interviewees expressed predicaments regarding menarche because they lacked information. They all advocate educating and providing information to teenage girls about menstruation and their reproductive health so they will understand menstruation accurately and prepare for menarche. They don't want their children and grandchildren to suffer from the unnecessary psychological challenges they experienced.

Access to Sanitary Products

All five women expressed difficulties dealing with menstrual blood due to the lack of menstrual hygiene products. Although access to period products was limited during their menarche, these rural Tibetan women eventually had access in their later adulthood. While it is unknown when period products first became available in the local community, we do know that from the late 1990s, packets of sanitary towels became available from small local stores owned by local Tibetans that also offered groceries, snacks, and beverages. These stores were also where locals gathered at night for movies and to sing traditional folk songs. Rta mgrin recalled that a bag of stacked paper towels could be folded into three to four sanitary pads and cost

five *jiao*.[58] None of the interviewees had access to sanitary pads during their menarche until the late 1990s. Mkha' 'gro skyid said:

> We might have been able to get period products at the local county town or township town earlier, but we lived in an isolated area and didn't have a chance to go outside the community. For instance, I went to the local township town for the first time in my thirties when there was very limited transportation.

The five women who shared their experiences have been part of a transformative shift as trousers, sanitary pads, and undergarments became available, leading to a new era of menstrual health practices. This period saw the adoption of disposable menstrual papers other than those made from cloth and donning multiple-layered pants during menstruation. The availability of sanitary towels presented hope for women. However, effective utilization of sanitary pads was a hurdle until undergarments became available. However, even with improved accessibility, financial constraints restricted the widespread usage of menstrual pads. The financial landscape, where women's autonomy over money was limited, accentuated this issue. Men oversaw finances, so women were compelled to make do with a frugal supply of sanitary towels, extending their usage to conserve resources. The embarrassment of purchasing sanitary products from local stores was another impediment to the rapid adoption of newer menstrual products.

STIGMA, SHAME, AND SILENCE

All five interviewees considered, at some point in their lives, that the onset of menarche was linked to sexuality. Menarche and menstruation were laden with stigma and shame, shrouding the topic in silence. Young girls were largely ignorant of menstruation until they experienced it. Menarche was inaccurately linked to being sexually active, which led to hurtful gossip, accusations, and fears for young girls. Daughters often concealed this important growth

[58] Basic monetary unit of China, ten *jiao* equals one *yuan*.

milestone from their mothers. Menarche brought confusion, guilt, distress, and internalized shame from a lack of knowledge, profoundly impacting women's mental and physical well-being while growing up.

None of the interviewees was given information or educated about menstruation by their mothers or others. Similarly, all except one interviewee were silent about their menarche. As a result, they underwent many challenging predicaments and quietly internalized the emotional turmoil menarche brought. For example, women encountered embarrassment and humiliation when working collectively in fields because of difficulty in dealing with menstrual blood and a lack of period products. This culture of stigmatization compelled girls and women to hide even severe menstrual symptoms. This was especially true for young women in the past. Shame seemed to diminish as they aged.

These negative perceptions have largely faded among younger generations due to lifestyle changes, normalization of using sanitary products, improved medical access, and the global convergence of mainstream cultures. However, exceptions exist, with certain elders reacting strongly against open discussions about menstrual health. Local women's understanding of menstrual cycles expanded as they had opportunities to interact with healthcare professionals. Yet, economic constraints made adopting health advice such as frequent and regular menstrual hygiene practices impractical. Taboos and social stigma attached to menstrual health made it more challenging to adopt constructive feedback from doctors.

CHANGING CULTURES AND MENSTRUATION

All five interviewees in this study appealed for better education for pre-menstrual girls so they would not experience serious emotional challenges when first experiencing menarche. Emotional struggles during menarche and periods and a growing understanding of menstruation have led to changes. Many local women now reject old beliefs, emphasizing the need for pre-menarche girls to be informed about menstruation before experiencing it. Furthermore, comprehensive education on menstrual and reproductive health and

the promotion of the health and well-being of young girls in schools is advocated. However, implementing this in schools poses practical challenges, including a lack of leadership support, funding, educational materials, and awareness regarding the importance of teenage girls' health. Some teachers' conservative attitudes further hinder its implementation.

Contrary to the old norms, young girls now receive menstrual information from their mothers or sisters. Conversations about menstrual health are increasingly common among young women, debunking misconceptions and stigma. However, accurate information about menarche, menstruation, and overall reproductive health remains limited among local girls.

Menstruation and Reproductive Health

Four interviewees recounted instances where women's access to medical care and treatment was hindered by embarrassment and stigma surrounding menstruation, with three mentioning cases where women tragically lost their lives due to these barriers.

These women's experiences bear witness to the challenges faced by women about menstrual health and the repercussions of a lack of accurate understanding of menstruation.

According to the interviewees, there were no historical dietary and physical labor restrictions during menstruation. However, rules have been increasingly introduced since 2000, as local women were provided with healthcare advice from medical workers regarding diet and labor practices during periods. For example, women were told to avoid spicy food, cold water, heavy physical work, and sex during the menstruation period. Drinking brown sugar tea for abdominal pain became customary. Women had increased access to healthcare providers, although they were still reserved in talking about menstrual-related issues.

Menstrual health encompasses a wide range of aspects, including physical, mental, and social well-being, and is not merely the absence of disease concerning the menstrual cycle.[59] According to UNICEF, adolescents across the globe face stigma, harassment, and

[59] See Hennegan et al. (2021).

social exclusion due to menstruation, leaving them particularly vulnerable. Gender inequality, discriminatory social norms, cultural taboos, and poverty can impact basic services such as toilets and sanitary products.[60]

Menarche and menstruation have significant implications, signifying womanhood and the ability to conceive and bear children. If girls/women are not careful and not fully informed about their reproductive health, they are at risk for menstrual-related diseases, sexually transmitted diseases, and unwanted pregnancies.

Perceptions and Beliefs Surrounding Menstruation

Locally, there are no specific rules on women practicing religious rituals during periods. However, more recently, some local women have come to believe that visiting sacred sites, such as the religious assembly hall and the family's shrine rooms, and practicing specific religious rituals is sinful during their period because menstrual blood has an offensive odor and is considered a pollutant, though no clear explanation for why it is polluting was given. They expressed concern it might contaminate religious figures and lessen their merit.

Furthermore, specific practices exist for disposing of used menstrual papers or cloths. Traditionally, these items were buried underground or burned in ash, as it was believed blood-stained menstrual pads should not be exposed to the sky to avoid offending spiritual beings like *klu*. Additionally, there have been instances where girls and their families have faced humiliation if menstrual pads were discovered around their homes, underscoring the importance of proper disposal practices. As a result, discussions around these issues have become less common, especially with the widespread availability of toilets equipped with garbage bins in each household.

One interviewee highlighted a positive aspect of menstruation, citing a belief she had heard that menstrual blood, particularly during menarche, was considered precious and possessed potential medical applications.

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[60] https://www.unicef.org/wash/menstrual-hygiene, accessed 20 October 2023

Another interviewee mentioned the paradoxical nature of menstruation, acknowledging its discomfort while also recognizing its perceived benefits. Specifically, they mentioned that despite the distressing aspects of menstruation, it was also viewed favorably because doctors asserted that the discharge of 'unclean' substances from the uterus occurred during this process.

Furthermore, one interviewee shared a common local belief regarding the karmic implications of being born a woman. According to this belief, women are considered to have accumulated 'less merit' and carry heavy 'karmic debts from past actions'. As a result of these karmic debts, women are believed to undergo experiences such as menstruation, pregnancy, and childbirth.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This paper aims to raise awareness about the significance of young women's menstrual health. It underscores the urgent need to enhance education on menarche, menstruation, and reproduction for local young girls, as well as understanding menstruation accurately. This is key to fostering a healthier and more well-informed future for the next generation of young women.

Factual knowledge empowers well-informed women and young girls to know what to anticipate and how to address their biological needs. Achieving this necessitates social policy changes and support to ensure ample resources are available. Examples include providing printed and digital materials on menstrual health, offering courses on human development, supplying sanitary products at schools, increasing the presence of female doctors and healthcare workers to create a more comfortable environment for female patients, utilizing social media platforms for educational dissemination, and fostering peer-to-peer support within schools.

Educating women is educating future generations. Societies must understand that women have specific biological needs. These are not choices we are presented with at birth.

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

This study has several limitations. The interviews were conducted solely with older, illiterate women from the local community, which may limit the applicability of the findings to younger, educated women or local nuns with different lifestyles. As a result, the study provides insights specific to a certain age group of women but may not fully capture the menstrual experiences of all local females.

Future studies could address these limitations by including a broader range of participants, including boys/men, girls/women, and nuns. This would provide a more comprehensive and in-depth understanding of local menstrual experiences and the various factors influencing these behaviors and perspectives.

LIVING THROUGH MENOPAUSE: VOICES OF RURAL TIBETAN WOMEN

This study underscores the need for greater awareness and education about menopause in rural Tibetan communities, where access to formal education and health resources has been historically limited. Nearly all individuals born before 1990 in this region are illiterate. Women spent much of their lives raising children, herding livestock, and cultivating barley, wheat, and canola in isolation. These women had minimal access to medical care and health information, which contributed to the gaps in their understanding of menopause and its effects on their health.

When faced with health challenges, these women typically visited the only Tibetan doctor in a neighboring village or traveled to the local township with limited medical resources. In addition to formal care, divination played an important role in their health practices. Locals often consulted *sngags pa* 'tantric practitioners', *bla ma*, or local *mo ba*[61] to determine what religious rituals to perform to address health issues.

With virtually no information about their reproductive health from a professional doctor, the women, busy with daily chores, endured physical discomfort until their symptoms became severe. Some women neglected their health, unaware of the potential consequences. In 2024, while locals had greater access to medical care and women could receive hospital treatment more conveniently, there was not much information available to older women about menopause.

At the beginning of each interview in this study, women typically stated that they had nothing to say about menopause, displaying indifference and a lack of interest. When asked questions.[62] they responded that they had little to share, claiming they experienced little discomfort during menopause.

[61] A person who predicted the future or knew the causes of an illness, often using prayer beads or a small box containing several tiny stones, and who offered religious solutions.

[62] See the Appendix for the questions that the women were asked in Tibetan.

My interest in this subject began when I read an article by Susan Dominus (2023), who told the story of a woman frustrated over the lack of effective treatment when she was experiencing traumatic and difficult menopausal symptoms. Although I was aware of menopause, this was the first time I understood how significantly it could impact a woman's health. This encounter motivated me to explore the menopausal experiences of local Tibetan women.

Traditional women's experiences of physical and reproductive health, particularly menopause, are often neglected or forgotten. Many people, including local women and men and healthcare workers, are unaware of how social and cultural contexts shape women's understanding and practices related to their health. There is a distinct local perspective and knowledge regarding healthcare in rural communities. Despite the global availability of advanced medical technologies and knowledge, many experience a significant gap between their understanding of menopause and their lived experience of its manifestations.

METHODOLOGY

This study focuses on the experiences and perceptions of *zla mtshan chad pa*[63] 'cessation of menstruation'/'menopause' of six illiterate Tibetan women from rural Bon skor Community. Informants had experienced or were currently undergoing menopause, representing a range of menopausal experiences.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted using guiding questions between February 2023 and June 2024. Participants were free to express themselves openly. Interviewees were not obliged to respond to questions and could choose not to. Interviews were conducted respectfully and with cultural sensitivity in the A mdo Tibetan dialect. All participants provided informed consent to participate in the study. Before the interviews, each participant was asked for permission to share their experiences and to have their voices recorded via phone. All agreed. Participants' names were changed to protect their privacy, though the provided birth years are accurate.

[63] This local term is used to describe menopause.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Menopause is a natural biological process marking the end of a woman's reproductive years. It is marked by the cessation, slow or abrupt, of monthly menstruation because of the loss of ovarian follicular function (World Health Organization 2022).[64] It typically occurs in a woman's forties and fifties, with the mean age of onset around fifty-one (Mayo Clinic 2021).[65] Menopause typically lasts about seven years but might extend to fourteen years, depending on lifestyle choices and onset age (National Institute on Aging).[66] Symptoms range from physical to psychological manifestations. They might include hot flashes and night sweats, disturbed sleep, fatigue, depression, cognitive difficulties, heightened anxiety, joint pain, skin and eye dryness, and changes in skin and hair, impacting women's overall well-being (Talaulikar 2022).

The prevalence of menopausal symptoms and age of onset vary between geographical regions and are linked to overall health, employment status, socioeconomic background, past experiences (Palacios et al. 2010), race, and ethnicity (El Khoudary 2020).

Tibetan Medicine provides insights into climacteric symptoms. While Tibetan medical terminology exists, there is a tendency to adopt biomedical terms for precision and convenience. Many contemporary Tibetan doctors understand *rlung tshabs* to be what biomedicine refers to as 'menopausal syndrome' (Tshe dbyang 2014). According to an early Tibetan physician (G.yu thog yon tan mgon po 2006 [1982]:375), menstruation is closely connected to *rlung tshabs* and exacerbated by such factors as psychological stress, childbirth, sexual activity, uterine bleeding, and malnutrition, resulting in joint pain, anxiety, dizziness, trembling flesh, numbness, and irregular menstruation.

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[64] https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/menopause, accessed 18 April 2024.
[65] Mayo Clinic. (2021). Menopause. https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/menopause/symptoms-causes/syc-20353397, accessed 18 April 2024.
[66] https://www.nia.nih.gov/health/menopause/what-menopause, accessed 18 April 2024.

Treatment options for menopausal symptoms vary across cultures and medical knowledge. Overall, the literature on menopause in Tibetan, Chinese, and English includes five main areas. The first area explores menopausal treatments, including Western Medicine, Chinese Traditional Medicine, Tibetan Medicine, and physical activities such as yoga. The second area scrutinizes these medical interventions' effectiveness. The third area focuses on factors such as geographical location, lifestyle, and altitude that impact women's menopausal symptoms. The fourth and fifth areas analyze the onset age of menopause across diverse regions and the menopausal experiences of women from various ethnic backgrounds.

Studies have demonstrated the effectiveness of hormone therapy (HT) in alleviating menopausal symptoms such as hot flashes and night sweats (Flores et al. 2021), reducing the frequency and severity of these symptoms (Mayo Clinic 2021).[67] However, this option is rarely available to Tibetan women.

Despite its efficacy, HT has potential risks and side effects that have been extensively researched. A major concern is the increased risk of cardiovascular events, including stroke and blood clots (National Institute on Aging 2021),[68] and an increased risk of breast cancer (Beral et al. 2003). Studies have shown that the risks outweigh the benefits of using HT, highlighting the importance of careful consideration and individualized decision-making (Writing Group for the Women's Health Initiative Investigators 2002). Exploring alternative therapies with fewer side effects, such as Tibetan Medicine, is an option, given the adverse reactions of HT (Cai 2011).

Studies have demonstrated the effectiveness of Tibetan Medicine in reducing symptoms when administered to patients over time (Wanma ji and Jimao jia 2018), (Cai Zang Ji and Duojie Cairang 2023).

A primary approach to addressing menopausal symptoms in Tibetan Medicine involves addressing irregular menstrual cycle and administering supplementary treatment of *rlung* 'wind', *mkhris ba*

[67] https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/menopause/in-depth/hormone-therapy/art-20046372, accessed 18 April 2024.
[68] https://www.nia.nih.gov/health/menopause/hot-flashes-what-can-i-do, accessed 19 April 2024.

'bile', and *bad kan* 'phlegm' based on specific menopausal symptoms (Cuoji 2013, Hu 2017). Additionally, *me btsa'* 'Tibetan moxibustion'[69] is promoted along with Tibetan herbal medicines such as '*ol se nyer lnga'*, '*sems bde', and 'a gar so lnga*' with dietary restrictions on spicy, sour, oily, raw, and cold foods, and encouraging physical exercises to promote blood circulation, alleviating symptoms (Qi 2020).

According to one experiment, Tibetan herbal medicine *se 'bru* 'pomegranate' can reduce menopausal symptoms without side effects (Tong 2008).

Traditional Chinese Medicine concludes that menopause is associated with a decline in kidney function and an imbalance between Yin and Yang, so treatment focuses on nourishing kidney function and rebalancing Yin and Yang (Wang and Yu 2021, Yu 2018).

Yoga practice has been found to alleviate insomnia and climacteric symptoms (Afonso et al. 2012, Khalsa 2004) engendered by the menopause cycle, such as psychological, vasomotor, and somatic symptoms (Permatasari 2018). Yoga practice may promote estrogen hormone and endocrine systems in menopausal women, which may lead to lessening menopausal symptoms such as hot flashes, night sweats, anxiety, and sleep difficulties (Archong and Plianbangchang 2021, Chattha et al. 2008, Afonso et al. 2016:11). However, more research is needed to determine if yoga effectively treats menopausal symptoms (Lee et al. 2009).

In Tibetan areas of China, altitude has been identified as a protective factor against osteopenia and osteoporosis in postmenopausal women, with high altitude associated with elevated bone mass irregularities and a lower incidence of osteoporosis (Zhong et al., 2023). Reduced pulse oxygen saturation in post-menopausal women at high altitudes is attributed to ovarian function cessation rather than chronological age (Gonzales and Villena 2000). Another study observed that women in high-altitude Himalayan regions experience menopause at 46.8 years and menarche at 16.2 years, indicating a consistent trend of early menopause and delayed menarche among this population (Beall 1981).

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[69] A fire healing therapy involving burning moxa (dried mugwort) on particular points of the body to help positive energy circulation https://newyuthok.it/en/tibetan-moxibustion-seminar/, accessed 18 April 2024.

Wang et al. (2022) investigated menopausal women from various ethnic groups in China and suggested that menopause-related symptoms vary among ethnic groups. A higher level of female status in the family and family support may reduce menopause-related symptoms in middle-aged women.

Qiong et al. (2023) explored the stigmatization experiences of Chinese women experiencing menopause and suggested they suffer physically and mentally within their families. For instance, one participant mentioned that her husband accused her of mental illness when she expressed cervical spine discomfort. Another participant shared how her husband forbade her from seeking medical care when she had joint pain.

Enhancing healthcare professionals' understanding of menopausal hormone therapy is essential to addressing the needs of the growing menopausal population in China (Lin et al. 2020). More research is needed to explore the intersection of menopause, work, and health within organizational contexts, as menopause remains unaddressed due to societal barriers (fear of ridicule, stigmatization, and stereotypes) and lack of recognition (Verdonk et al. 2022).

Despite extensive research on menopause, few studies examine Tibetan women's experiences, knowledge, and perspectives of this life stage. More research is needed on how Tibetan women perceive menopause and how cultural beliefs and limited access to resources and professional medical care shape how they understand it. I explore the experiences of Tibetan women experiencing menopause, the range of symptoms experienced, their awareness of the process and their knowledge of strategies for effective management of the symptoms.

INTERVIEWS

LHA MO RGYAL (B. 1972, AGE 52)

I am fifty-two years old and haven't yet undergone menopause. I think this is good. Local women think it is a disadvantage if a woman has her menopause at an early age, like in one's forties, believing it results in physical issues later. For example, my mother-in-law (who has passed away) couldn't see well after her menopause at forty-five.

I think I will have my menopause in the next few years. I don't have many premenopausal symptoms, but an obvious change was my menstrual cycle becoming irregular when I turned forty-six. Sometimes, menstruation comes earlier, and sometimes it is delayed. I thought something was wrong and consulted a Tibetan doctor who took my pulse and prescribed Tibetan herbal medicine. My period became regular for some time. However, later, I didn't menstruate for two months. Although I was concerned that I might have menopause at an early age, I didn't go to the hospital. Finally, my periods resumed. Women around me all hope they will have their menopause in their fifties.

I have never received care, financial, or emotional support from my husband, who spends his time roaming around and drinking alcohol. I no longer expect him to care about me. However, my children care about my health, though I often avoid burdening them with unnecessary concerns. In addition, our community has never organized events to provide healthcare information about menopause or other topics, but they once offered free physical check-ups.

When I was around forty-three, I couldn't see clearly, felt dizzy, and often had headaches. I then went to the local county town with my daughter-in-law, who could speak Chinese, and we consulted a Chinese doctor who checked my blood pressure and tested my blood. I was diagnosed with hypertension. The doctor prescribed biomedicine to lower my blood pressure. It alleviated my symptoms. Later, some people around me said taking biomedicine for the long term is not good, so I replaced it with Tibetan medicine. I also tried to be cautious with my diet, reducing my consumption of meat, milk, and butter. Now, I am nearly recovered from high blood pressure. I think these symptoms might be related to my experience of menopause at an early age.

I occasionally feel stressed and distressed and become absent-minded. I don't have hot flashes but they are common for some women I know. For example, my sister-in-law, who is in her forties, was alone one night and came to stay at my home. She told me she had a tough time with sudden heat in her body, especially her palms and soles, and was damp from sweat. At the time, we didn't know these were premenopausal symptoms.

I rarely hear women around me discuss or attach much importance to menopause. We don't know much about it. No medical workers told me about menopause symptoms. However, local women

often say that it's not good to have menopause early because it leads to health issues or diseases. Instead, it's good to have it later in their fifties.

Today, women don't often visit each other's homes for intimate talks like they used to because we have smartphones through which we see the world.

I am not worried about menopause and hope I won't experience menopause until I'm in my late fifties.

KLU MO (B. 1960, age 64)

I have nothing to say about menopause. I had my menopause at forty-four. I thought I was pregnant at first and went to see a doctor who said I was experiencing menopause.

I didn't know menopause indicators, and I didn't have any of the symptoms you just mentioned. I never worried about menopause and did not consider it a significant transition. The only thing I heard from local women was it was not good to have it early because that caused eye issues and affected the heart.

I had no negative health conditions after menopause.

BSOD B+HE (B. 1963, AGE 61)

I went through menopause at the age of forty-six and felt liberated from abdominal pain, exhaustion, and discomfort I experienced during menstruation.

I experienced hot flashes, anxiety, exhaustion, and irregular menstrual cycles, but I didn't realize they were related to menopause. I mostly brushed them off. When they became severe, I visited a doctor who prescribed Tibetan medicine after taking my pulse. My husband and children care about my health, but I usually don't share much with them. They are all busy with their responsibilities and making a living.

Years after menopause, I had joint pain and was diagnosed with hyperostosis. For this, I tried Tibetan therapies like acupuncture and moxibustion, which somewhat helped alleviate my backache and joint pain for a short time. My doctor also recommended that I sleep on a hard rather than a soft mattress.

When I experience heart issues, I often find solace in prostrating and circumambulating at religious sites, which calms my mind. I've heard from older women that early menopause can lead to health issues

like eye problems and joint pain, but they rarely mention other symptoms associated with menopause.

SGRON MTSHO (B.1945, AGE 79)

I don't remember much about my menopause. I ignored it because my daily life was full of house chores, herding, and farming. I had no time to care about it.

I didn't have any issues before and after menopause. Menopause can bring comfort and freedom to women. We no longer need to care and worry about how to deal with menstruation every month.

I once consulted a Tibetan doctor in another community for Tibetan cough medicine. When he asked me about my menopause, I was ashamed to talk about it. He advised me not to take many contraceptive drugs, which would cause gynecological issues. He said many women came to him for medicine because of heavy menstruation.

I don't recall discussing menopause with local women. We didn't regard it as important.

MKHAR MO (B. 1970, AGE 54)

I witnessed several cases of women in their forties whose menstruation stopped for one to two years and then returned, which finally led to their deaths from excessive bleeding. This used to happen among local women who generally say that early menopause is not good and that it's important to have a physical examination after menopause begins.

I am fifty-five now. Most women my age have already experienced menopause. I believe my menopause will happen soon as my cycles have become irregular, which my doctor says is a sign of impending menopause. I've been dealing with various physical symptoms, including occasional hot flashes when I feel a sudden wave of heat and begin to sweat, especially my palms and soles. These episodes usually subside after a few minutes. It's been almost four years since my hot flashes began. They continue to this day, which has affected my mental well-being.

Over the past few years, I've become forgetful. I often find myself standing somewhere, not knowing what I'm doing. In addition, I've become emotional and emotionally vulnerable.

When I visited doctors in the local county town, they didn't attribute these issues to perimenopause. Instead, they prescribed medication based on the symptoms.

I also experience chest tightness and shortness of breath. My voice trembles when I talk to people, and I suspect it's due to a heart issue. However, when I went to the provincial hospital and had an electrocardiogram, no heart problems were diagnosed. The doctor suggested my symptoms were partly due to menopause, and I was prescribed a month's worth of biomedicine, which didn't relieve my symptoms, so I stopped taking it.

In addition, I regularly have pain in my back, knees, and pelvis. After having an X-ray, I was diagnosed with abnormal bone growth. Afterward, I've used ointments and medicinal patches, which provide temporary pain relief. I've also undergone Tibetan medical therapies like *skam khab* 'acupuncture' and *me btsa'* 'moxibustion'. I took biomedicine, which can alleviate my joint pain when it becomes severe.

To cure the pain, my husband asked a *bla ma* for advice and had my family perform religious rituals and chanting. We invited monks to our house and completed all the rituals. I also took Tibetan medicines, which provided some relief, though the symptoms reoccur. It's hard to endure these frequent physical discomforts. No medicine offers lasting relief.

My family members care about my health and often take me to see doctors when I am ill, but I haven't received any particularly effective treatments. Neither the local community nor the government has organized events to provide information about menopause and other aspects of women's health.

Recently, I have been experiencing irregular menstrual bleeding, which is concerning. I'm particularly afraid of having heavy bleeding during menopause.

Some time ago, I experienced irregular bleeding that lasted for nearly fifteen days. I underwent a hysteroscopy after consulting a doctor, and an endometrial polyp was removed through dilation and curettage. Initially, I was hesitant to undergo the procedure and tried using Chinese herbal medicine to stop the bleeding, but it was ineffective. Eventually, I decided to proceed with the surgery.

Following the procedure, Dydrogesterone tablets were prescribed to be taken for fourteen days each month starting from the

first day of my period for six months. I was also asked to take calcium daily. I hope to navigate menopause without too much difficulty.

I've seen many doctors but haven't found any truly effective medicine. Some medications alleviate my symptoms temporarily, but the symptoms eventually return.

RTA MGRIN (B. 1970, age 54)

I learned from local women that menopause typically occurs in our forties or fifties. Furthermore, they advised that if menstruation stops in one's forties, a visit to the hospital is recommended to ascertain whether it's due to menopause or other factors. However, if menstruation stops in one's fifties, it's generally considered normal. Unlike menarche, the onset of menopause is a topic openly discussed among local middle-aged women. But we don't regard it as an important issue causing severe problems.

I experienced menopause at forty-four, which raised concerns about early onset. Fortunately, I encountered no significant issues before or after the transition. For me, the process was gradual. Initially, my menstrual cycles stopped for three months, then resumed for five months before ceasing completely.

I consulted a doctor when my menstruation paused for three months. He recommended an ultrasound B test. I didn't fully understand what they were checking. Later, the doctor assured me everything was fine, and there was no need to worry. Many of us, local illiterate women, often don't know what medical reports mean and rely on what the doctor tells us.

During menopause, my whole body, especially my palms and soles, were abruptly hot, and I sweated occasionally for some minutes at a time. These symptoms lasted seven to eight years. Sometimes, I experienced hot flashes three or four times a day, but sometimes, they disappeared for a month or so, only to reoccur. I first thought I had a fever and was infected with tuberculosis, but this was not confirmed when I had a physical test. I didn't specifically consult a doctor for my hot flashes.

I also experienced heightened anxiety and irritability in response to loud noises, was persistently in a low mood, wanted to avoid social interactions, and felt overwhelmingly exhausted. It was a challenging period, made more difficult by no one understanding my condition. I was

unaware that these symptoms were related to menopause. No local women or doctors had ever mentioned this association.

My family members genuinely care about my health, but I find it difficult to constantly share my usually mild symptoms with them unless they become severe. Additionally, there haven't been any instances where the local community has organized events to provide information about women's health.

At forty-six, I began experiencing joint pain, but I didn't pay much attention to it. Five years after menopause, I was diagnosed with abnormal fat levels in my blood, although I'm unsure it was related to menopause. Additionally, I found it much easier to gain weight after menopause.

I consider it beneficial that I underwent menopause at an early age since I no longer had to deal with menstruation and reproduction. In this sense, I feel liberated and more like a man regarding bodily experiences.

A notable change after menopause was a shift in my feelings toward my husband. I found that I no longer experienced sexual desire for him. I often felt tired of his presence and experienced vaginal dryness.

Based on my observations, women around me seemed to have little awareness or concern about menopause and associated conditions. Also, I didn't meet medical professionals who discussed specific health issues related to menopause.

DISCUSSION

We gain insight into the attitudes and understandings of menopause among local women in rural Tibet through the voices of the six women interviewed. Their experiences offer a glimpse into their generation's shared knowledge and beliefs, shaped by long-term interactions with one another in daily life.

All participants understood that menopause signified the end of their menstrual cycle, marking the cessation of fertility, typically occurring in their forties or fifties. However, they were unaware menopause could lead to certain physical discomforts or symptoms. At the beginning of the interviews, all the women claimed they had not experienced any physical or emotional discomfort during menopause. However, when presented with a description of

recognized conditions such as anxiety, hot flashes, joint pain, and irregular periods, they realized they had indeed experienced some of these discomforts but had not linked them to menopause.

While local women do discuss menopause, it wasn't a topic frequently brought up in conversation, possibly because it was seen as unimportant. One participant mentioned feeling embarrassed discussing her symptoms with a doctor. There was also a shared belief among the women that the early onset of menopause might lead to health problems such as eye issues and joint pain. Consequently, they regarded late menopause as preferable, although some felt that early onset was liberating.

Healthcare professionals had not informed any of the women that certain symptoms were linked to menopause. When they visited doctors, they were not told that what they reported was related to menopause. Instead, treatments were based on their specific complaints, and diagnosis was often made by taking their pulse. Some women sought medical help when they experienced irregular periods or after their menstruation stopped, while others had no physical examinations. Some only sought medical help when their symptoms became severe.

One participant, experiencing significant physical and emotional challenges, sought medical help from various doctors. A doctor at a provincial hospital prescribed biomedicine for menopause, but it had little effect. Despite trying multiple medications, she found little relief. Her family regularly performed religious rituals and chanting to help alleviate her condition, which provided some emotional comfort and a sense of healing.

In terms of treatment, in addition to biomedical interventions and Tibetan medical therapies such as acupuncture and moxibustion, religious activities were crucial in managing physical and emotional discomfort. Local women commonly performed prostrations and circumambulation as remedies to alleviate their anxiety and provide emotional solace.

For some women, the end of menopause symbolized liberation from physical discomforts such as abdominal pain associated with menstruation. However, one participant expressed concern about the potential dangers of menopause, stressing that women should take it seriously, as it could lead to severe

complications like excessive bleeding, which she believed had caused the deaths of local women due to a lack of awareness.

One participant mentioned experiencing symptoms of vaginal dryness and a significant reduction in sexual desire, which had affected her relationship with her husband.

This study reveals a disturbing lack of information and awareness among participants. Almost none of the women interviewed received information about menopause from local healthcare workers or other sources, nor had they attended any meetings focused on women's health. Furthermore, the women lacked comprehensive knowledge of menopause and its potential discomforts beyond the cessation of menstruation in their fifties, underscoring an urgent need for improved education initiatives in this area.

CONCLUSION

This study highlights local women's need to correctly understand menopause, its indicators, and effective coping methods. Without proper knowledge, women who experience significant physical and emotional challenges may not attribute these issues to menopause and might take unnecessary medications.

Many women lack awareness of how to manage menopausal challenges effectively, often internalizing their struggles and enduring avoidable suffering due to misconceptions. Without a contemporary, informed perspective, these challenges can adversely affect their personal well-being and family relationships. The need to improve women's health education, particularly concerning menopause treatments, to enhance their overall health and quality of life is emphasized.

To achieve this, governments might organize programs and disseminate accurate healthcare knowledge in a culturally respectful manner. Furthermore, educating students in schools would encourage empathy and understanding toward mothers and other women, encouraging greater support during this vulnerable life stage.

This study's limitations include the experiences of six local women. To develop a more comprehensive understanding of menopausal experiences, future research should include a larger and

more diverse group of participants. Additionally, examining men's understanding and attitudes toward menopausal women and identifying cultural barriers would provide valuable insights into the social environment women navigate and the support they receive during menopause.

Further areas of exploration might include the use of Tibetan medicine or other traditional remedies for managing menopausal symptoms and the role of religion and spirituality in helping women cope with the emotional and physical changes of menopause. Such investigations could offer deeper and more valuable insights into how cultural, traditional, and spiritual factors influence women's experiences and well-being during this significant life transition.

LHA SGRON (1946-2023): A TIBETAN ELDER REFLECTS ON ORNAMENTS AND LIFE

My paternal Grandmother, Lha sgron's (b. 1946-2023), gives her views and experiences with ornaments. A herder for most of her life and a dedicated Buddhist, she became a nun in 2012. I interviewed her in Bon skor Community In the summer of 2020.

(R) Lha sgron (2009, Bon skor Village, unidentified photographer). (L) Lha sgron became a nun in 2012. Her name then became Rig' dzin dbang mo (2016, Bon skor Village, Snying lcags rgyal).

I was born in Bon skor in 1946. It is a herding area. We moved seasonally between our summer and winter pastures with our livestock, black yak-hair tents, and other belongings. My family had sheep, goats, cows, horses, and camels, but my community had no yaks. We loaded the black tent and our other belongings on several camels. Camels were our most important pack animals.

My tribe was called Dpon tshang 'leader's family'. My uncle was our community leader. He inherited leadership after his father's death and rarely stayed home. His leadership duties meant he needed to go to

the county town and other places. I called my uncle's wife "mother" from the time I could talk. She raised me.

She delivered a baby before I was born, who, unfortunately, passed away when she was a toddler. She had no more children. She was very kind and loved me like her own child. So, I had two mothers. We lived in one family and had a wonderful, happy life.

My father was recognized for chanting and often was in other homes, chanting for them. Others respected us since my uncle was the local leader. We had no problems with food and clothing.

My family had many valuable adornments such as necklaces and ornaments with coral, turquoise, and silver. I don't like the fake coral and silver that I see now.

Social chaos in 1958 dramatically changed my family's condition. We had poor food, housing, and clothing. My father was imprisoned and died there. My uncle was also imprisoned. He was allowed to return home after a few months. However, he became ill and passed away soon afterward when he was thirty-seven.

In 1960, my uncle's wife returned to her parents' home in Stong skor Community near our community. On the way, she encountered people who were mistreating the local political and religious leaders, as well as people who had been wealthy in other tribes. She was detained, beaten, and killed because she was the wife of a leader. All her necklaces, bracelets, and hair ornaments were taken.

I had many ornaments, including necklaces from my mothers when I was little. I got some coral from the middle of the *smar gdan* 'hair ornament' of my uncle's wife (whom I call mother) and some coral and turquoise from my biological mother's necklace. I lost most of my turquoise when I played with other children as we chased and pulled each other.

At that time, every woman wore her ornaments every day, including little girls. Women attached great importance to their adornments. I also wore my necklace almost daily and treasured it since it was a gift from my two beloved mothers.

I married when I was nineteen. When I left my home, I left my silver adornments but took the coral necklaces my two mothers gave me. My husband's family bought me additional coral and silver ornaments from Muslim merchants.

I have five daughters and two sons. All the daughters left home at around seventeen or eighteen to live with their husbands. The husbands' families bought adornments and clothes for them, so I didn't give them ornaments. We were not responsible for purchasing adornments for them.

I stopped wearing ornaments after my older son married. I gave my necklace to my son's wife, who was now our family's housewife. I also gave most of the family responsibility to my son and daughter-in-law.

I never planned to sell the coral necklace my two mothers gave me because I regard it as a family heritage. When I was young, I liked wearing necklaces and ornaments. I thought precious adornments were important and necessary. I was excited to wear a Tibetan robe and put on a necklace, bracelet, and hair ornaments. When I met others, they would typically say, "You are so beautiful! Your necklace is wonderful!" which delighted me.

My interest in wearing ornaments gradually faded, and my ideas about adornments changed as I grew older. I now have little interest. Ornaments are meaningless. Everything is impermanent. I encountered a lot during my life journey. I tragically lost beloved family members. The period of chaos transformed and destroyed my happy life.

I have spent most of my life rearing children and herding. Even though life has been very tough, I never gave up because of my children and family. I had to make a living and raise all my children.

After my sons were married, I no longer had much family responsibility, so I began to focus on religious chanting, circumambulation of holy sites, and prostration. Tibetan Buddhism is the most important thing for me. I considered becoming a nun and became one at Tho le Monastery[70] in 2012 after my family members agreed.

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[70] Tho le Monastery (Tho le dgon rnam rgyal phun tshogs chos rdzong gling) was originally located in the Tho le area near the Yellow River in the northwest of Mang ra County, thirty-nine kilometers from the County Town. Founded by Dge 'dun bstan pa dar rgyas in 1916, it was a branch monastery of La mo bde chen Monastery. In 1984, the monastery was relocated northwest of the contemporary Mang ra Township due to the construction of Longyang Gorge. The monastery has thirty-four monks and one incarnation *bla ma* (Nian and Bai 1993:201). Mtsho sngon zhing chen srid gzhung dra ba reports Tho le practices the Dge lugs tradition and 1878 as the founding date. A monastery photo is available at

Every day, I pray to Buddha, chant scriptures, and meditate, which helps me eliminate hatred, desire, and other negative thoughts. Buddhism is good not only for the present life but also for the afterlife. It helps you accumulate merit and diminishes your past sins.

When I recall the difficulties I have experienced, I do not desire a rich material life. I have no admiration for beautiful women wearing fancy clothes and adornments. They are impermanent and meaningless. Buddhism is the most important thing for me.

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http://tb.tibet.cn/tb/religion/temple/201708/t20170822_4344137.html, accessed 12 January 2021.

PART TWO
SHORT STORIES

A MDO TIBETAN HERDERS TRAVEL TO THAILAND, SINGAPORE, AND MALAYSIA FOR TWELVE DAYS (2016)

In early January 2016, I was at home, having just left my university in Beijing, where I had drifted aimlessly for one semester. I majored in air service and was destined to be a flight attendant after graduation. Every day, I was required to learn how to make up, dress well, and engage in various physical exercises to maintain an attractive figure. I also had etiquette courses. English sessions related to airplane broadcasting were provided, but students rarely focused. Most were from wealthy families and had no worries about money. They were immersed in a comfort zone with no particular purpose in life. A teacher lectured to hundreds of students sitting in steep rows in a big hall. Only a few concentrated while others slept, chatted, or busied themselves with their cell phones. This was our boring, tedious, and meaningless routine. It was not what I wanted, so I dropped out of school with my family's approval.

After a few days at home, my father said, "Good news! We're going to travel to Thailand, Malaysia, and Singapore!"

One of Father's Chinese friends had told him about an opportunity to travel abroad. He then informed some local people, who agreed to go. While other travel destination options, such as Japan, Taiwan, and Hong Kong, were available, the decision was made to visit Thailand, Malaysia, and Singapore because we could visit three countries relatively inexpensively.

Hardly able to believe this, I was exhilarated! It was my first time traveling abroad.

Though Father never attended a formal school, he taught himself to write Tibetan and is fluent in the Qinghai Chinese dialect. He has been, and in some cases, still is a herdsman, farmer, driver, businessman, and community leader. Father loves our family and often takes us on pilgrimage and travels, but we had never been abroad.

Sixteen men and seven women, including my parents and me, were on the twelve-day journey. We were all from Mtsho sngon Province, PR China. I was nineteen and the youngest. Except for four

Chinese from Ping'an County, Haidong City, the rest were Tibetans from Bon skor Community. The average tour member was about fifty years old, illiterate in Chinese (except for the Chinese), and a herder or farmer. It was a thrill for all of us to travel abroad.

Younger people are eager to travel, but their family's economic conditions restrict them, so any opportunity that arises usually goes to their parents and grandparents.

A travel agency was responsible for all trip arrangements, including passports, visas, hotels, meals, and flight tickets. Each person was required to pay 6,200 RMB.

Given the weather difference between Southeast Asian countries and Mtsho sngon, we were instructed to pack summer and winter clothes. My parents also packed *rtsam pa* 'barley flour with butter and cheese', cooked mutton, and fried bread to be on the safe side.

STARTING OFF

Our expedition began one chilly morning when we left our community in several cars for Zi ling (Xining, the capital city of Mtsho sngon Province).

That afternoon, all the tour members assembled in the travel agency office. A staff member stepped out to welcome us when we reached the office threshold and offered us each a cup of water. Our Chinese companions had already arrived. Most of the Tibetan travelers wore Tibetan robes. A few minutes later, a young Chinese woman appeared with a document under her left arm, introduced herself as our tour guide, recited detailed regulations, and described the trip. She spoke only Mandarin, which was an issue for the Tibetan elders who understood no Chinese and had had almost no interaction with Chinese people.

Consequently, I was asked to translate to Tibetan, though most group members were not listening. The room brimmed with chatting. When we were required to fill out forms in Chinese, I assisted our Tibetan members.

A coach soon arrived. We loaded our luggage and set off for Caojiabao Airport, which we reached two hours before our flight took off. I helped the tour guide take all the flight tickets from the ticket-

dispensing machine and check in our luggage. She had given specific instructions on what was prohibited when checking in and what could not be in carry-on items. The only problem that emerged was overweight luggage for two travelers whose families had packed a lot of food - homemade bread, cooked meat, barley flour, and so forth - in case the elders were unaccustomed to the food in foreign countries.

Next, everyone passed through the security check. The inspectors told us to remove our shoes and socks. Certain security personnel had a cold attitude and slowed our process, maybe because we wore Tibetan robes. A man aggressively ordered us to take our items swiftly from containers that passed through the scanners. All of the group got through except for Rgya mtsho, a middle-aged man.

"Open your bag!" ordered a young male inspector. He dug out a bottle of shampoo, a tube of hair oil, and a small knife and informed one of our members that they were prohibited items.

"Don't worry, the knife is for eating meat," boomed Rgya mtsho, who speaks loudly by nature and is gifted at making jokes. "Why can't I take them with me? I need them," said Rgya mtsho in Qinghai Chinese dialect, but he had to discard them.

We next headed toward the boarding gate, and I escorted some elders to the toilet. Later, as I sat with my mother in a waiting room, an elderly woman beside me confided nervously, "I've never been on a plane. I'm a bit afraid."

"Don't worry, it will be fun," I comforted.

There were no vacant seats in the waiting room. All the men were standing, chatting, and laughing.

We soon started to line up at the boarding gate, and before long, the plane took off. One and a half hours later, we reached Xi'an at dusk. We gathered at the baggage claim zone, where our tour guide waved a flag. Everyone took their luggage to a coach waiting for us at the terminal gate. We boarded and went to a hotel where two people shared a double room. I shared a room with the tour guide.

Father proclaimed enthusiastically, "Shaanxi noodles are famous, so let's eat out!"

We then went to a Shaanxi noodle restaurant near the hotel and ate noodles (*youpomian*). Mother complained, "It's better to eat barley flour and bread. These noodles are so spicy they'll make me sick."

The next morning, we embarked on an early flight to Thailand. This time, no one had trouble during the security check. I saw the elders enjoying the views outside the plane windows, including the woman who was worried about flying.

"Nowadays, everything is so convenient. People born in this century are so lucky! We are traveling from one country to another, Unbelievable!" said an old man, fingering a string of prayer beads.

The time and distance we had flown were regularly announced throughout the flight. After five hours, a flight attendant informed us that the plane was descending in preparation for landing. I peered out the plane window and saw the landscape of verdant trees and lawns, as well as the sparkling golden temples of Bangkok. "Why are there such huge differences between this country and mine? We are geographically very near, so why are the climates so different?" I puzzled.

I had come from a place where it was winter and snowing, and everything was ashy, but here, in Bangkok, it was summer, and everything was green.

BANGKOK ARRIVAL

As we landed safe and sound, the flight attendant reported it was around forty degrees Celsius outside.

People from all over the world were at the airport. It seemed as though we had come to another planet. We were astonished to see Muslim women covered from head to toe in long black dresses and black veils. They were peering out from eye holes in complete veils. They were different from Muslim women in China, who do not have such strict clothing rules.

We changed RMB to Baht at the airport. One RMB was five Baht. Everybody was thrilled to use foreign money for the first time. The weather was hot and humid. I was sweating and found it hard to breathe.

Later, a Thai woman in her thirties with long dark hair and big eyes with double eyelids approached us and warmly announced, "Welcome to Thailand!" in Mandarin before leading us to a big blue tourist bus with a black driver.

I was astonished that the driver's seat was on the right instead of the bus' left side. When we boarded, the driver smiled at us. When some of our tour members said, "Hello!" the only English they knew, he smiled and nodded in greeting.

The air-conditioned bus was cool and comfortable. On the way to our hotel, our Thai tour guide taught us a Thai greeting, "*Sah wah dee kha*," to which we all repeated, "*Sah wah dee kha*" excitedly, including the men and women in their sixties.

We saw people wearing light clothes, shorts, T-shirts, skirts, and sandals. We had been told to wear thin clothes, but most of us wore long-sleeved shirts and pants, which were too hot in Bangkok. Tibetan elders are unaccustomed to wearing shorts in public.

We reached a hotel in a big compound with a fountain, lawn, and trees and were immediately offered a buffet supper at the hotel restaurant. I thought there would be Thai food, but there were only Chinese dishes. After dinner, we all went shopping near the hotel. All writing was in Thai, which I thought resembled the Arabic on Muslim restaurant signs in China. We communicated with shopkeepers through gestures. We met our fellow Tibetans in a clothing shop where we bought T-shirts and shorts. The clothes were very colorful with various patterns, including elephants, the national symbol of Thailand. We wanted to talk with the local people, but the language was a barrier.

Later that evening, everyone was asked to tip five Baht for the hotel attendant who would clean the room after we left the next day.

As I left the room in the morning, I met a young female hotel attendant in the corridor. She greeted, "*Sah wah dee kha*," joining her palms in front of her chest and lowering her head.

I shyly said, "*Sah wah dee kha*," without bowing.

On the third day, we visited the Royal Throne Hall Museum, which has magnificent architecture. We were all fascinated by the Museum's stunning grounds, which have green lawns and vibrant flowers, so we busily took selfies and group photos.

The building's interior and exterior designs were splendid. The Thai monarchy's history was featured in paintings, images, and artistic works in gold and silver. Sculpted images and illustrations were on every wall and ceiling. Soldiers stood in every corner of the

courtyard. Royal places in Thailand have a strict dress code requiring women to wear skirts instead of shorts when visiting.

Though particular designated places were luxurious, some parts of the city appeared old, run-down, and chaotic.

Bangkok's transportation included buses, taxis, motorcycles, and tuk-tuk 'auto-rickshaws'. Most coaches were double-deckers with colorful, rainbow-like paintings and decorations.

Every several kilometers on the streets were Portraits of both the King and Queen of Thailand. "The King of Thailand is good because he has only one wife. Most Thai men have more than one wife," our tour guide informed us.

There are thousands of Buddhist Temples in Thailand. Thai men are expected to join monastic life at least once in their lives to show gratitude to their parents. Unlike Tibetan Buddhist monks, I was shocked that many men could be temporary monks.

We dined at a buffet restaurant where we could view all of Bangkok from the eightieth floor of the Baiyoke Tower, the tallest building in Bangkok. An older woman with acrophobia was scared of standing by the window, while others enthusiastically took photos while enjoying the majestic views. Everyone was happy with the abundant food choices in that restaurant, including Chinese dishes, Japanese sushi, and various seafood. Tibetans in my home community don't eat seafood, but Rgyal mtsho held a plate with a big crab and said, "Let's spoil ourselves and not miss this golden chance!"

Some elders looked at him disappointedly. Local Tibetans think that eating seafood is more sinful than eating mutton or yak meat.

A woman proclaimed, "There was diced fruit near my seat a moment ago. I liked it, but it's not here now. Weird!"

Finally, we found it on the other side and realized that the seats were revolving.

"How ridiculous!" she said.

It was dark when we finished eating. The luminous cityscape, the orange glow of lamps, and vehicle lights made the streets sparkle. Streets were both straight and winding, stretching in every direction among the tall buildings enveloped in smog in this crowded, noisy, modern metropolis.

On the fourth day, along with many other tourists, we visited the Grand Palace at Bangkok's heart. The distinctive design of the palace, temples, and stupas impressed with a dazzling golden brightness. We were required to remove our shoes before entering a temple housing a large Buddha image. Many visitors knelt with their palms joined in worshiping the Buddha image. We did the same.

Along with many Chinese tourists, we boarded a ship for a river cruise in the afternoon. Soon, we were offered a meal. Spaghetti, pizza, and Chinese dishes were on tables in the ship's center, and people pushed and squeezed around them. Thai singers performed Chinese instead of Thai songs, perhaps because most tourists were Chinese. Later, they chose singers from the audience, including a young fellow Tibetan who loves singing. He performed a Tibetan folk song. We enjoyed the beautiful scenery and sunset as the ship glided down the river.

When the river cruise ended, we boarded a bus to an auditorium to watch transgender performers dressed in gowns with adornments such as hairpins with white feathers and sparkling gold necklaces. They danced in line with different props, such as fans and pieces of cloth. They resembled female demons in the TV show *Journey to the West* who dance to seduce Monk Tangseng while he is searching for Buddhist scriptures to bring back to China.

In the end, a muscular woman entered the audience, pulled a man to the stage, and made him sit on a chair. Other women tied him up, wrapped a strip of cloth around his eyes, slapped his face, and otherwise toyed with him.

Later, when the woman came into the audience again, I was so scared that I jumped out of my seat and ran away in fear she would grab me. I had enjoyed the first part of the show. Still, the last part of the show had terrified me, so when visitors were taking photos with the trans performers after the show outside the auditorium, I was afraid to approach and take pictures with them, though I wanted to.

On the fifth day, we boarded a bus to Pattaya. Halfway there, we visited a park where visitors were entertained by interacting with tigers, monkeys, and pigs. A fun event was pigs running a race. Each pig was numbered, and when a man whistled, they began running.

A young man and woman in uniforms performed with the crocodiles. The woman tugged a crocodile's tail. Occasionally, it

seemed irritated, opened its mouth, and bellowed. When it opened its mouth, the man put an upright stick between its palate and tongue for a while, removed it, and then put his head inside, which was frightening.

Later on, we went to a restaurant to eat roasted crocodile meat, soup, and dishes that the Chinese tourists eagerly enjoyed. Most Tibetans refused to eat the crocodile meat, although a few younger ones tried a little. When those who didn't asked, "How's the flavor?" Bsod nams rgyal replied, "It's tasty!"

A Chinese man assured them, "It's good for your health. You'll never find such good meat again!"

Eventually, the Chinese man persuaded a few more Tibetans to eat it. I also tried a bit. It was as white as bread and had a strong, fishy flavor.

We were bewildered when we emerged from the park to see our framed photos on a desk. They had been taken as we had entered the park, but we hadn't noticed. A photographer with a camera strapped around his neck explained that we could either pay and take the photos or not pay and leave them. Elders said, "It's not good to leave the photos there," so we paid and took all of our photos.

What a fun way to make money!

At dusk, we reached Pattaya, a prosperous coastal city famous for its beautiful beaches. We hung around Pattaya at night, boarding a medium-sized boat to a restaurant on the sea a few minutes from the seashore. We had supper there while transgender women wearing elaborate multicolored gowns danced on stage in the restaurant's center. It was hard to guess that they were trans from their appearance. I curiously wondered why there were so many trans people in Thailand and why they wanted to change their gender.

Afterward, these performers came into the audience. A Chinese man embraced a trans woman and danced excitedly. Our table was near the stage where I sat with my mother, father, and some young Tibetan fellows. Two women came and urged the Tibetan men to dance with them. I was embarrassed and blushed, as such behavior is shameful among relatives. Hence, we left for another room, returned to the seashore, and strolled along a bustling pedestrian walkway. Bars and restaurants emitted vibrant, colorful lights. Loud, varied music exploded into the street. Many people were hanging

around. Every doorway of every bar featured women wearing sexy clothes, waiting to welcome guests. It was very cheerful! As we walked along, we saw a man with a ghost mask standing on the road before us. He was very tall, had a white face with blood on his forehead, gray hair, and long black clothing. He stood on metal stilts that were about three meters tall. I was terrified and couldn't even gaze at him. However, others shook hands and posed for photos with him. It was all so different and exciting that we hung around until late at night.

On the sixth day, we boarded a speedboat to a small island. In the middle of the sea, my fellow Tibetans and I tossed small colorful bags of grain we had prepared while at home for our family's wealth and prosperity. As we threw them into the sea, we all yelled, "*Lha rgyal lo*! 'Victory to the deities'!"

As the boat sloshed back and forth, there was a lot of noise, and a woman shrieked, "Yul lha! Yul lha!" invoking the name of one of our local deities.

The island's impressive landscape resembled a picture featuring emerald woodland, a crystal-clear sea, and a cloudless blue sky. People on the beach were lying under umbrellas, while others were swimming and surfing. I suddenly imagined people having fun on a sea where piranhas attacked and ate them. This made me afraid to step into the sea as the waves lapped the beach. But eventually, I walked into the sea up to my waist. It was thrilling! I wanted to spend more time there, but our time was limited.

A little later, our tour guide led us to a concrete platform where people were parasailing. Elders were warned not to go there, but one older man insisted, "I don't want to miss this chance to parasail. I have no health issues."

Many parachutes in the sky were being towed behind a motorboat. Later, tour members who wanted to participate put on life jackets, lined up, and, one by one, excitedly flew up with their parachutes attached. After circling the platform three times, they landed, except for one of our group members, a middle-aged man, who fell into the sea after being airborne for only a few seconds. The boat pulling the parachute was far from him, though he was near the concrete platform where we stood. We could see his head in the distance. Luckily, two lifeguards quickly went out in another

speedboat to rescue him. He smiled as he approached us and commented, "I thought I would see Gshin rje chos rgyal[71] today!"

On the seventh day, we headed to the Elephant Theater. How delightful elephants are! Many elephants strolled around the venue in an orderly line, following a mahout holding a sharp metal hook. Later, some adorable baby elephants came. A performance included the elephants standing in a line, kicking a soccer ball into a net. I was astonished by their human-like moves. Another impressive show was the mahout putting a paintbrush in the trunk of an elephant that then painted flowers, which earned claps and shouts from the audience.

When the show ended, the elephants were allowed to move freely in the enclosure. Visitors gave them bananas. The elephants stuck out their trunks to take them and put them into their mouths. When we gave them money, they bowed their head and even knelt in thanks. Two elephants joined their trunks, making a seat for people and providing a perfect photo opportunity, which excited them.

Earlier, I had read about elephant abuse online. Some were beaten to behave in certain ways. Some were slaughtered to make products from their ivory and skin. When I saw the metal hooks carried by the mahouts, I remembered that behind this impressive show was brutality - no wonder these majestic and powerful animals behaved so well, which depressed me. Many visitors were enjoying the show without knowing the suffering behind it.

Next, we mounted steps to a platform where you could sit in a carriage on the back of an elephant. "This is not good. Riding an elephant reduces your fortune. Elephants are revered animals," cautioned some Tibetan elders. Nevertheless, a few young Tibetan men ignored this and enjoyed sitting in the carriage.

That evening, when we were on the bus, our tour guide announced, "We will see a trans sex show!" in Chinese.

I was bewildered and shocked. I had no idea what kind of show it would be, but I thought it must be inappropriate to watch with relatives. There was no reaction from my fellow Tibetan travelers. Clearly, they did not understand. I explained the taboos among relatives to our Chinese tour guide, and she also thought it improper. Finally, she arranged for all of us Tibetan women to visit

[71] God of Death.

an art gallery near the theater that featured creative drawings while the men and two Chinese women went to watch the show. Later, while waiting for our fellow tour members, the two Chinese women returned. One, who was very red in the face, announced with embarrassment, "It's crazy!"

The Tibetan women had no idea what she had said. After I explained, Glu mo, a middle-aged woman, said, "It must be a disgraceful show."

The others giggled.

SINGAPORE

On the eighth day, we flew to Singapore. As we exited the airport, a sudden storm poured down on us, but we enjoyed it because the rain brought cooler weather.

Eventually, a new tour guide came with a bus to pick us up. She briefly introduced Singapore on the bus: "The Garden City is another name for Singapore. It rains nearly every day during the monsoon, from November to January."

We just happened to be there during that time, January.

The rain stopped after a few minutes. As we looked through the bus windows, we beheld extremely clean and tidy surroundings with no street trash. Lawns and trees on both sides of the road were orderly. After the rain, they were glossy and green. We visited a place near the sea that featured modern buildings of distinctive designs.

On the ninth day, we visited a duty-free shop that sold rings, earrings, bracelets, and necklaces with various gemstones. Most of my fellow travelers didn't like them because they were very small compared to Tibetan adornments featuring coral and turquoise that are much larger.

Singapore is small, so we only spent one day visiting tourist sites. There were undoubtedly other sites to see and explore. Singapore was an attractive, orderly country, and I hope to visit again.

MALAYSIA

In the afternoon of the ninth day, we proceeded to Malaysia by bus, which took four hours. On the way, we saw many cars going in both directions. Our tour guide explained that, though they were in two separate countries, motorists commuted between Malaysia and Singapore for work or business.

When we arrived, we were taken near a harbor to see the famous Straits of Malacca, between the Malay Peninsula and Indonesia, an important shipping channel for many countries. At the port, there were many multicolored shipping containers and cargo ships. I was excited to see the Straits of Malacca because I had learned about it in a high school geography class, though I recalled nothing except its name. I posted a video of the bustling harbor with my location - The Straits of Malacca - on WeChat and soon got many likes. My former classmates commented, "Wow! The Straits of Malacca!" "I'm looking forward to going there."

On the tenth day, as we took an elevator down in our hotel, someone unintentionally pressed the emergency button, which set off a constantly ringing alarm. The elevator stopped moving, dumbfounding us all. After a few seconds, the bell stopped ringing, and we heard a man's voice through a speaker in the elevator, asking, "Do you need help?"

"No, thanks! We just pressed the wrong button," I said, and the elevator resumed operation.

Everyone then asked, "What did you just say? If you were not here, we would be in trouble!"

Feeling a little happy, I thought, "English is useful!"

Malaysia is well-known for its white coffee, so we visited some shops selling flavored coffee, chocolate, and cookies. The salesman offered us small cups of various coffee to taste. Some were bitter, and some were sweet. An old man sipped one cup, exclaiming, "This is terrible! It tastes burnt!"

Most of our group members bought a few packs of coffee and chocolate, even though they didn't like them very much, as gifts for family members and friends.

Our bus soon stopped in Kuala Lumpur to photograph the modern, majestic Petronas Twin Towers, where Petronas, Malaysia's national petroleum company, is headquartered.

In the afternoon, we took a cable car to a mountaintop with an elevation of 1,800 meters, with many tall buildings, hotels, and entertainment venues. It was much cooler than in the lowlands. Visitors filled the hotel lobby. I thought it would be hard to find a hotel room, but to my surprise, that hotel building had thousands of rooms. After arranging our rooms, we were told of a big casino nearby. Most of the men were excited to hear this and went to observe people gambling. I also wanted to visit but didn't because the women disapproved, saying, "It's not an ideal place to go."

In my home community, gambling has been a bad influence. Some men gamble obsessively, bringing massive financial losses to their families.

On the eleventh day, at noon, we headed to the airport and flew back to China at six p.m. Five hours later, we were back in Xi'an, where the weather was icy cold. We again donned our warm Tibetan robes before being taken to a hotel for the night.

RETURN HOME

The next day, everyone was eager to return home. After breakfast at the hotel, we boarded a bus to the airport and took a ninety-minute flight to Xining. On the plane, our group leaned back in their seats. Some slept. Exhaustion from our journey lined their faces. Our relatives were waiting when we reached the airport, holding white *kha btags*[72] in welcome. "Let's go eat our local noodles and meat," some tour members said.

Food was a problem for most of our Tibetan members throughout the journey. We, especially the elders, were used to mutton and yak meat, which were unavailable in the places we visited. There must be great cuisines in those countries, but the travel agency arranged for us to eat at touristy restaurants that mostly provided food that was not memorable.

[72] A white strip of cloth made of silk or wool.

There are huge differences between my home area and the countries I visited. Thailand is a nation of friendly people and abundant natural resources, including marine environments. The utilization of local resources included trained elephants and crocodiles that perform to attract visitors. In contrast, most people in my home area depend on herding and farming. Locals lack the economic means and know-how to use local resources effectively. Travel to modern, urbanized countries gives us new ideas for a better future, which we want to help create.

My father enjoyed the journey. He appreciates unique architecture and designs, and especially appreciates the Thai temples. He also thinks travel helps him relax and feel free from life's many stresses. However, my mother didn't enjoy the journey very much. She doesn't like noisy, crowded urban areas. Instead, she likes quiet places and often goes to monasteries to chant, circumambulate, and prostrate.

A few days after the journey, when we looked through our photos, she said, "I don't see much difference between these countries and ours. They are both full of tall buildings and cars. I felt exhausted when I traveled around the city. I should go on pilgrimage and prostrate."

This voyage of discovery helped me realize the significance of studying other people's cultures and life, which offers insight into the world and helps eliminate ignorance and misconceptions. I discovered how little I knew about the world and how useful English is in connecting with cultures and people beyond my local world.

PHOTOGRAPHS

FIG 1. Tibetan travelers at the Xi'an Xianyang International Airport in Shaanxi Province (January 2016, Rdo rje dpal 'byor).

FIG 2. Tibetan travelers at a cafeteria in Bangkok (2016, Rdo rje dpal 'byor).

FIG 3. The Grand Palace in Bangkok, Thailand (2016, Rdo rje dpal 'byor).

FIG 4. Yul lha thar on a White Orchid River cruise in Bangkok, Thailand (2016, Rdo rje dpal 'byor).

FIG 5. The Grand Palace (Bangkok, 2016, Rdo rje dpal 'byor).

FIG 6. Tibetan travelers on a speedboat in the Gulf of Thailand (2016, Rdo rje dpal 'byor).

FIG 7. Btsun pa rgyal parasailing in Pattaya, Thailand (2016, Rdo rje dpal 'byor).

FEMALE DILEMMA[73]

The early morning was tranquil and undisturbed, except for cricket chirps in the distant barley, wheat, and canola fields. A dawn chorus began as sunrise chiseled at the night's darkness. Early birds perched on courtyard walls and the branches of poplars, willows, junipers, and apricot trees. Their twittering was more audible in the morning because the raucous thump-thump of hand tractors, honking of cars searching for people looking for rides to the township town, mooing cows waiting to be milked, and crowing roosters had yet to begin.

As usual, Mtsho skyid woke up at six on her adobe bed heated by the stove that channeled heat through the bed, warming it. The stove was also used for cooking. Mtsho skyid's bed companions were her seven-year-old daughter, Klu mo - nicknamed Klu b+he - and her loudly snoring husband, Dbang chen. Klu b+he slept peacefully, wrapped in the warm sheepskin robe her grandmother had made. After securing her pink head scarf, Mtsho skyid donned a robe made from black synthetic sheep skin, cinched a red sash around her waist, and rolled up her sleeves to do chores more comfortably.

An old-fashioned, grimy wooden cupboard ornamented with carved flower-like patterns stood against the wall facing the door. The upper shelves displayed well-organized rows of bowls patterned with dragons and the Eight Auspicious Symbols.[74] The central cupboard had four flower-decorated enameled steel kettles and a wooden case with a sliding top with containers of roasted barley flour and bits of dried cheese. Screwdrivers, nails, and pliers were stored in a row of drawers at the bottom.

Every morning, Mtsho skyid polished the cupboard until it gleamed using a towel with a small piece of sheep fat.

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[73] An earlier version of this story is at https://archive.org/details/female-dilemma-tibetan-short-story, accessed 10 April 2025.

[74] The Eight Auspicious Symbols are the parasol, gold fish, treasure vase, lotus, right-turning white conch, victory banner, the Dharma wheel, and the eternal knot.

She scooped ash from the adobe stove into a rusty metal container, carried it to the outhouse, and emptied it. Next, she filled the now-empty container with dry cow, sheep, and goat dung and carried it to a storeroom. Heading to a corner of the fenced orchard in the family courtyard, she put chopped firewood in the front fold of her robe, carried it back to the house, and put the firewood and dung into the stove. She lit a bunch of straw to start the fire while chanting Skyabs 'gro[75] non-stop.

Buddhist scriptures with yellowish covers were arranged in order on the shelves in the shrine room. Mtsho skyid and Dbang chen leafed through them at least once a year. Sometimes two or three relatives helped turn the pages of each scripture on the day of a religious festival, usually after the Tibetan New Year. Images of Tara[76] and Ao rgyan rin po che[77] hung on the walls.

Mtsho skyid prostrated seven times after offering water in seven medium-sized copper receptacles on a table in front of the shelves to the Buddhist images and scriptures and after lighting a butter lamp. With her palms together, she prayed for her family's well-being, peaceful and harmonious relations between people, and protection from accidents and disasters.

Holding a wooden bucket, she walked to the pen where cows and calves were tied to poles some distance apart and drove two Holsteins, a black cow, and a white-spotted brown cow from the pen, shielding the cattle from rain and chilly air to an open-air enclosure. She grabbed a frayed rope from the ground, hobbled one of the Holstein's back legs, and began squeezing the smooth teats, sending milk spurting and splashing inside the bucket.

After what she deemed a proper milking time, she untied the hobble and the cow's three-month-old calf from the pole. The calf jumped crazily, rushed to its mother, and vigorously butted her udder. The energetic nursing seemed to pain its mother, but she suffered

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[75] *Skyabs 'gro* or *Skyabs su 'gro ba* 'Taking Refuge'. Accepting the Three Jewels (the Buddha, Dharma, and the Sangha) as refuge and decisively committing to free your and others' suffering in Samsara (https://bit.ly/3DfwCzv, accessed 20 October 2022).

[76] Spyan ras gzigs, Avalokitesvara.

[77] Padmasambhava 'Born from a Lotus'.

placidly, periodically swishing her tail and turning to look at and lick her calf.

After milking three cows, sunlight illuminated the earth, heralding a splendid, sunny spring day. Smoke coiled up from the chimney of every household. "How fast time passes," Mtsho skyid thought and hurried to finish other chores.

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When she first came to her husband's home in autumn, she had difficulty adapting to the farming workload. The family had twenty *mu*[78] of barley and thirty *mu* of canola. All the farm work was done by hand, and there was no escape, even late in her pregnancy. Her husband was frequently absent, wandering and drinking with his friends, and she needed to assist other families in a web of reciprocal labor relationships during the harvest season.

She now had some leisure time and felt less anxious.

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She had dreamed of falling from a cliff the night before, which filled her with foreboding. A sgrol, a neighbor's thirty-year-old daughter, suffered from ovarian cancer. Several years earlier, A sgrol had gone to a distant pastoral area to collect caterpillar fungus, had formed a relationship with a local man, and brought him home. Locals gossiped that he was homeless. The couple lived together but held no wedding and soon left. Her parents said they had gone to do construction work.

A sgrol was very ill when they returned after several years. Once plump and dynamic, she was a barely recognizable pale, skeletal figure. Her family invited monks to chant scriptures to heal her. When there was no improvement, her family took her to a hospital, where she was diagnosed with ovarian cancer. The doctor suggested chemotherapy.

A sgrol's father, Khon rgyal, consulted a *bla ma* for a divination, which was that chemotherapy was not ideal. Time passed, and eventually, they accepted the doctor's recommendation.

A sgrol lost all her hair during chemotherapy treatments.

Now, a year later, her condition steadily worsened. Dpa mtsho, A sgrol's mother, understood her daughter could not be cured

[78] One *mu* = 0.067 hectares.

and desperately wept from time to time. Eventually, A sgrol needed help eating and when toileting.

A sgrol's husband had escorted her home after the years of absence, then left, and did not return. They had no children. He had said he would return soon after visiting his parents, but it was a lie.

Later, A sgrol's parents tried unsuccessfully to contact him. Her mother blamed and cursed him for her daughter's condition.

Mtsho skyid occasionally took milk to her neighbor's household.

Dpa mtsho once desperately declared, "Now, bones are all that remains of my daughter. We should have followed the *bla ma's* initial advice and never done chemotherapy. That's why her condition worsened."

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Mtsho skyid and some fellow women weeded in the field and gossiped about anything new in the community.

"What a pity! A sgrol got a horrible, incurable disease," said one woman with a pink headscarf.

"It's the consequence of her grandfather's misconduct for burning religious scriptures during the chaos years ago," said another.

"Also, her husband abandoned her. What a pathetic woman!"

Mtsho skyid remained silent.

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After milking six cows, Mtsho skyid put the full milk bucket in a high place to prevent the calves from knocking it over. She then drove two steers out of the pen and collected dung amid the odor of manure familiar from the day of her birth. Collecting a willow branch basket from a pen corner, she slung it on her back and tossed moist manure piles she picked up by hand into the basket. When it was full, she carried it to the foot of an earthen wall that also functioned as the house's outer yard. After four such trips, she shaped and pressed the moist manure into thin, flat patties with her hands and stuck them on the adobe wall. She pulled them off when they were dry and stored them in the fuel room.

After completing all her duties in the animal pen, she carried the full bucket of milk to the room where milk, cheese, butter, and sacks of wheat, barley, and canola were stored. She carefully opened

the door to keep the cat inside, which prevented mice from eating the grain.

She poured milk into a giant stainless-steel cylindrical vessel, then took the wooden bucket with a bit of milk back to the house. Her husband sat cross-legged by the adobe stove on a rectangular black and white striped rug woven from sheep wool and yak hair. He fingered his prayer beads and chanted *Skybs 'gro* while Klu b+he scampered around the house murmuring and holding a doll Mtsho skyid had acquired by trading five months of hair from her brush with a haor-buying vendor.

Mtsho skyid washed her dung-encrusted hands in a stainless-steel basin on a washstand outside the house. Her fingertips were cracked from daily chores.

Inside, water rapidly boiled in the pot on the adobe stove over a fiercely burning firewood-dung fire that occasionally sent out bursts of flame.

Mtsho skyid shredded some tea leaves from a tea brick and tossed them into the pot with water and milk to make milk tea. Next, she scooped up smoldering cow dung, placing the dung on the altar in front of the house. She added two full spoons of barley flour mixed with juniper needles and sugar and sprinkled it with water. She next flung water to the sky with a small copper ladle while beseeching the deities to protect her family from evil and misfortune.

Returning inside, she put *rtsam pa*[79] in Dbang chen's ceramic bowl and hers. She added dried cheese, butter, and milk tea from the wooden case, then offered her husband his bowl with both hands. She helped her daughter mix *rtsam pa*, butter, and sugar in a small wooden bowl and next put a plate of steamed buns on the ground to eat.

Eventually, Mtsho skyid sat on a small rug at the foot of the stove and sipped milk tea. Her daughter sat by her father, breaking the silence by counting bits of tea that floated in the tea and joyfully announcing, "Three guests will come today."

"Don't sit cross-legged. That's how boys sit," chided Mtsho skyid.

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[79] Roasted barley flour.

Klu b+he reluctantly sat like her mother, kneeling on both knees, though sitting cross-legged was more comfortable.

Klu b+he was six and hadn't started school. Locals believed it was better to send children to school when they were around nine or ten years old as they were more likely to understand and learn better and be better able to avoid bullying from other students.

As Mtsho skyid thought about Klu b+he and school, she recalled her time there.

▪▪▪

Before Mtsho skyid began school, she imagined it as a wonderful place where she would play with other children. She envied her cousin, Rdo rje, when he described how much fun he had with other children playing hide and seek, in running competitions, and so on.

The reality was very different.

Walking to school early in the morning was a nightmare, especially in winter. When she left home for school, it was dark, the darkness suggesting many terrifying possibilities. The school was about three kilometers away from her house, so it was a long walk. Every morning, she woke up full of fear and worried that she would be late again.

The five-year-old family watchdog began barking when she clanged open the metal gate but calmed once it recognized her. She trembled as the cold penetrated her thick clothes and wrapped her orange-red scarf around her head, exposing only her eyes. Moonlight illuminated her dark, silent path as stars sparkled in the sky. She searched for the Big Dipper as she walked along the rough, unpaved path and noticed a meteor streak across the sky and vanish, meaning someone would die. Now sorry she had seen it, she chanted *ma N*i[80] as her grandmother had instructed in such situations.

"Where did the meteor go?" she wondered.

Halfway to school, she suddenly noticed a dark, human shape in the distance. Her heart raced. Hardly able to breathe, her steps slowed. The 'thing' was near the path. She looked around but saw nothing out of the ordinary. She took a few more steps and waited for a passerby to follow. As it grew lighter, a student approached. She

[80] The Avalokitesvara mantra: *oM ma Ni pad+me hUM* – the Six Sacred Syllables.

followed. "Pitiful!" she thought as she saw the' thing' was a man wearing a black robe lying on the ground, his head covered with the robe.

"Maybe he's drunk," she guessed.

She was late for school. Her head teacher scolded and humiliated her by ordering her to stand in the center of the schoolyard for an hour. During the first-class break time, students surrounded her. Embarrassed, she stuck her chin to her chest, totally overwhelmed.

Her younger classmates were often maltreated. The monitor and his companions were tall and bullies. If a child got a new notebook, pen, or snack, they snatched it and warned, "If any of you accuse us to the teacher or your family, you'll be sorry!"

Math was the students' weakest subject, including Mtsho skyid. The teacher wrote numbers on the blackboard in every math class while talking. Most students had no idea what he was teaching. Mtsho skyid appeared to concentrate, but fear forced her to stare intently at the blackboard until the class ended.

After the math teacher assigned homework, she copied everything from others.

The teacher furiously announced the students' scores after every exam, glaring at those who got very low scores. Next, he ordered the monitor to bring a skipping rope from his office. Students who didn't pass the exam had to roll their pant legs up and line up while the teacher whipped their calves with all his might. Some cried and trembled. The rope left red, swollen welts that transitioned from numbness to agonizing pain.

No student told their parents about such punishment or other students' bullying. Like her peers, Mtsho skyid hid her bruises from her parents and kept quiet about her monitor's bullying in fear of more abuse.

She often wished to stop attending school. By coincidence, when she was in Grade Four, her father said schooling was useless and told her to stay home and help herd livestock, which was exactly what she wanted.

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"You should grind some barley flour for the religious ritual," said Dbang chen.

A month earlier, Mtsho skyid had experienced pain in the joints of her feet. The *bla ma* said this was because she had dug soil near a spring, disturbing the water deity, so the family should chant and hold a ritual near the spring.

After a quick breakfast, Dbang chen drove their cattle along a narrow rocky track toward the family's grazing land, about an hour away. Each household's grazing land was fenced to avoid their livestock mixing with other families' livestock.

She was satisfied and happy with Dbang chen, who seemed to have settled down. He now helped her with the family chores and had stopped drinking. It seemed he had learned from his earlier insane behavior and its consequences.

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Some months before, Dbang chen drunkenly cursed Mtsho skyid without provocation other than general life discomfort. She responded with a few words and suggested he sleep.

In response, he violently shoved over a wooden cupboard with glass sliders and drawers. Glasses and bowls shattered, and broken shards covered the floor.

Dbang chen grabbed her by the hair. Mtsho skyid pleaded with him to stop, afraid their sleeping daughter would be frightened, but he continued shouting curses and threats. Klu b+he woke. Terrified by the broken glasses and bowls, overturned cabinets, and her father abusing her mother, she shrieked, crying loudly.

Fed up and insecure, Mtsho skyid scooped up her daughter and strode out of the house, her heart filled with hatred, resolving never to live with that crazy man again.

She pessimistically thought, "What evil did I do in my last life to merit this miserable life?"

She patted Klu b+he's head and comforted, "Don't be afraid, sweetheart. It will all soon be fine."

Klu b+he clutched her mother tighter, confused about her parents' relationship.

They walked two kilometers to Mtsho skyid's brother's house, where they spent the night. The following day, her brother drove them by motorcycle to the herding area where their parents lived.

Once there, Mtsho skyid tearfully described how her husband abused her. Despite her mother's attempts to persuade her to return, she stayed for a month,

"I'm so sorry about your situation, but this is a woman's destiny. A marriage is more important than anything else for a woman. Divorce shouldn't be your choice because others will denigrate you," her mother said.

Some of Dbang chen's older relatives came asking her to return. Mtsho skyid's mother said they needed to come again with Dbang chen, who had to promise not to beat his wife and to stop drinking.

After some weeks, the relatives returned with Dbang chen, who wrote and signed a statement that he would no longer drink and never again abuse Mtsho skyid. If he violated these promises, his relatives would be responsible, further authenticating this pledge with fingerprints from his left hand.

Considering her mother's advice and thinking about Klu b+he's future, Mtsho skyid reluctantly returned.

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Mtsho skyid picked up the black ceramic container wrapped in a robe containing wheat flour that had fermented the night before on the warm adobe. She took it to the cutting board and poured the fermented dough into a plastic basin, leaving a piece of starter dough for the next fermentation. She sprinkled a bit of baking soda on the dough, added water and wheat flour, and divided the dough into two pieces. She mixed oil with one and added nothing to the second piece.

After kneading some of the dough, she cut a piece and made it into a thin round shape, using a cleaver to make linear patterns, and put it on a metal plate she held with one hand. Taking a towel and a scoop in the other hand, she walked outside, where she had prepared a pile of smoldering sheep dung powder the night before. She brushed away hot ashes atop an aluminum pot she had buried the night before, put the dough inside the pot, picked up the pot cover with a cloth, and covered it with hot ash. She removed one loaf of baked bread at ten-minute intervals and started baking another.

At the same time, taking an old wooden churn from the storeroom, she placed it under the shade of a tree in the yard and poured the three full containers of milk she had collected three days

earlier. She put the churn stick in the churn, closed the lid, and sealed the crevice with dough to prevent milk from leaking.

Folding the front part of the robe under the sash and rolling up her sleeves, she began churning the milk, counting the number of churns. She would bake bread later.

After two hours of churning, she opened the churn. Butter was at the top. She took a handful of butter from the churn, put it in a basin of cold water, and patted it into a ball.

Later, she boiled the buttermilk and filtered cheese through a netting bag fastened between two wooden poles.

She cut a piece of hot just-baked bread and smeared fresh butter on it for Klu b+he, playing alone in the garden. She hurried toward her mother when she knew there was hot bread with butter - her favorite.

"Sister, are you at home?" called a man suddenly, approaching her house.

Wondering who it might be, Mtsho skyid immediately replied, "Yes, I'm here," and stepped outside.

The neighbor's son said, "My mother is asking for your help to cook. The *bla ma* will arrive soon."

"*Bla ma*?"

"Yes, my sister's condition is worse. She's eaten nothing in days and constantly moans in agony. She's in great pain. We can't bear to see her going through all this. Our relatives gathered and discussed a solution. We finally agreed to invite the *bla ma*."

"I'm really sorry! I'll come in a few minutes."

Worried and agitated, she hurriedly cleaned the churn and walked with her daughter to the neighbor's house. When they arrived, the mother asked Mtsho skyid to make dumplings for the *bla ma*. Mtsho skyid went to the kitchen where Mkha' 'gro, the neighbor's daughter-in-law, was rolling out the dumpling wrappers.

They greeted each other.

"I'll be responsible for making the wrappers. Please wrap the filling since I can't make good-looking dumplings," Mkha' 'gro asserted.

"Sure, I'll wrap them," Mtsho skyid replied.

As she put a bit of minced meat in the center of each wrapper and expertly closed it, she thought how miserable the ill woman's

mother must be. Mtsho skyid knew she would have gone crazy if anything like that happened to her daughter.

About an hour later, a red car arrived with the *bla ma*. Everyone went out to welcome him. The driver got out first and greeted them all, then assisted the *bla ma* in getting out of the car as everyone bowed to show respect. Khon rgya bowed, extended his hands with upturned palms in greeting, and escorted the *bla ma* into the house.

Plates of fruit and fried bread were on the living room tables. The *bla ma* sat on a seat covered with yellow fabric higher than others in the room and was offered milk tea with butter in a yellow bowl decorated with the Eight Auspicious Symbols. Mutton and dumplings would be offered later. Lay people sat on small stools and described A sgrol's situation.

Khon rgya was in a gloomy mood. His heart must have been bleeding, but he tried to appear strong.

After they all agreed to chant *'Pho ba*,[81] the *bla ma* was led to a small room where A sgrol la, a barely breathing human skeleton, lay, no longer recognizing anyone. The *bla ma* began with words comforting at least the onlookers and began chanting. Others knelt and prayed with their palms together.

A sgrol had one brother and two sisters. All were married. The brother remained in his parents' home, while the two sisters had moved to their husbands' homes in other communities. The sisters visited their ill sister once, but didn't have much time to stay. They were responsible for their own family chores, herding, and babysitting.

When the *bla ma* was leaving, the family offered 500RMB with a *kha tag*.[82] Everyone kowtowed, and the *bla ma* touched their heads with a string of prayer beads.

In a melancholy mood, Mtsho skyid clutched her daughter's hand and returned to her house late in the afternoon.

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[81] "The transference or ejection of consciousness at the moment of death, a practice which may be performed for oneself or on behalf of ..." (https://www.lotsawahouse.org/bo/topics/transference/, accessed 20 October 2022).

[82] A strip of white scarf.

Before sunset, her husband drove the cattle back from the grazing land and, as usual, said nothing. He seemed unhappy, which was his normal mood. He lay on the bed to watch a TV program while Mtsho skyid chopped mutton on a small cutting board for dinner.

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The following day, when Mtsho skyid learned that A sgrol had passed away, she went to help. The house was full of weeping. A sgrol's sisters had arrived and mourned. Mtsho skyid tried to console them, but it was not until an older woman urged, "Crying brings a lot of fear to the deceased in Bar do,"[83] that they ceased wailing.

Young women who were close relatives replaced their hair bands with white ones, while the young men turned their hats inside out to demonstrate respect for the deceased. Some attached a white ribbon to the hats.

When locals heard the news, they visited the family one after another to offer condolences, offering tea bricks, butter, and money. Relatives and neighbors came to help with the cooking and religious rituals. Women were busily cooking and serving the visitors.

Dpa mtsho offered a huge *tsha gsur*[84] at the courtyard gate to prevent the deceased from experiencing hunger and alleviate her fear in Bar do. Seven monks from a local monastery came and chanted for seven days to lessen A sgrol's sins, to ensure she would have a good next life and be reborn as a human, and to prevent her from going to Hell.

Hundreds of butter lamps were made and lit in lines on a long, rectangular table. Some men tended the lamps, cleaned the depleted ones, and made new butter lamps. Everyone held a string of prayer beads and ceaselessly chanted *ma Ni*.[85]

A sgrol's sisters wailed plaintively when a new visitor or relative arrived. A sgrol's mother did not cry. Perhaps her tears had

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[83] An immediate state in the death-rebirth cycle where the soul resides between death and being reborn into the world (https://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/%E0%BD%96%E0%BD%A2%E0%BC%8B%E0%BD%91%E0%BD%BC, accessed 29 October 2022).

[84] An offering of a mix of roasted barley flour, three whites (milk, yogurt, butter), and three sweets (sugar, molasses, honey).

run out, or perhaps months ago, she had accepted her daughter's death.

Two days after A sgrol's death, an esteemed senior nun sat in the upper part of the room and started *ma Ni*-chanting in a melody reserved for certain rituals. Others followed in chorus, creating so much emotion that some wept uncontrollably.

Late that night, men took the corpse in a car to a sky burial[86] site according to the *bla ma's* suggestion. Relatives chanted and offered butter lamps for seven days. Local women fasted together twice for A sgrol. Mtsho skyid also participated, chanting 100,000 *ma Ni* and praying for A sgrol.

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Human fragility was now so obvious, Mtsho skyid resolved to chant more frequently and trust Buddha to provide protection and well-being in her current and future lives.

[86] A funeral practice involving placing a corpse on a mountain or outdoor structure to decompose or be eaten by scavenging animals https://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/sky_burial, 23 December 2024).

A STITCH IN TIME[87]

In 2007, I lived with my parents in my community's farming section when I was seven. Most villagers were busy at harvest time. However, my family had finished reaping wheat from our fields two days earlier. Locals customarily took turns helping each other harvest, but I played with other kids. I was about one meter tall, had short curly hair, a round face, red cheeks, a light complexion, dark eyes with double eyelids, and thick eyebrows. I wore a suit my mother had made, a cap with a red star above the visor, and handmade sheepskin shoes. Everyone thought I was a boy. I was mischievous, outgoing, and often laughed. I was also short-tempered.

One morning, I struggled to wake up, only vaguely aware of my parents' chatting. Mother called me to get up. She put barley flour, milk tea, and butter in my bowl and prepared steamed buns. Steam drifted from the buns, fresh out of the pot. "I made your favorite bread this morning," she announced and went into the courtyard to churn milk.

After breakfast, I went into my family's small garden to play with a Barbie doll. Sensing that someone was approaching me, I glanced up. It was Aunt Ste be, holding a sickle. I was so excited that I hugged her.

She suggested, "I'm going to your uncle's field to help harvest. Do you want to go with me? It's interesting in the fields."

I was pleased to hear that, but I was afraid Mother would not give permission. Finally, with Aunt's persuasion, Mother agreed and cautioned, "Don't be naughty!"

I promised I'd be obedient and happily left. When we passed through the courtyard gate of my home, I saw my neighbor driving his single axle walking tractor hitched to a trailer in circles on a threshing ground covered with rapeseed. His son, Lhu rig, was enjoying himself on the trailer. I wanted to join Lhu rig on the trailer

[87] A previous version of this story is available at https://archive.org/details/ahp58astitchintime, accessed 10 April 2025

and play with him. I thought it would be fun, so I told Aunt I didn't want to go to my uncle's field anymore. She spoke to my neighbor, who agreed I could stay. I climbed onto the trailer where Lhu rig and I played joyfully.

We were having a nice time and then pain suddenly pierced my right hand. It had been caught between an electric pole and the tractor for a second. I panicked when I saw my hand bleeding, cried loudly, and yelled, but my neighbor didn't hear.

Lhu rig was quiet, didn't move, or offer to help. Maybe he was shocked by all the blood. I was suffering badly. My hand had almost been cut into two parts between my middle and ring fingers. There was a lot of blood. I was frightened and had no idea what to do. Again, I shouted and cried as the pain worsened. I shook. I couldn't stand it.

My neighbor hadn't noticed anything. The tractor was very noisy. I angrily stood up in the trailer and went to where he was seated. I wanted to stretch my hand in front of him, but I didn't. I continued shouting and crying and then jumped off the trailer.

I heard Mother calling me. She came quickly and was shocked. "What's wrong with your hand?" she asked repeatedly.

At last, the neighbor stopped driving and stared at me.

"What did you do to my daughter's hand?" Mother demanded.

My neighbor said not a single word.

Mother took me home and wrapped my hand in cloth. Father was absent, and there was no local clinic, so Mother called Aunt's husband and asked him to take us to the clinic in Bya mdo Township Town by motorcycle. It was fifteen kilometers away. I was in severe pain.

Once we arrived, two women doctors examined my hand and said something in Chinese that I didn't understand. One doctor approached me, holding a needle. I cried in terror and tried to escape, but two women held me down and injected me with an anesthetic to allow my wound to be stitched without pain.

I was not allowed to watch during the procedure. The anesthetic worked. I didn't feel much pain. My hand was wrapped in gauze when I was allowed to look at it.

When we returned home, Mother put a mat on the porch for me to sit on, made noodles with mutton, and fed me as tears flowed

from my eyes. I oodles. Mother insisted I have more, but I couldn't. I had no appetite.

Father arrived and was very anxious. I wept again. I felt very weak. After a short while, Aunt came, and I began sobbing again. I couldn't control myself. My heart had melted.

I was put on an intravenous (IV) drip for three terrifying days.

The next day, Father and I went to a larger township town. Many patients were receiving IVs in that clinic. Father was very familiar with the doctor, who was a monk. After Father had described my situation, a nurse brought a needle.

Another needle! I was so afraid I scrambled under the bed. "My dear daughter, please come out! You won't suffer from pain. I'll buy your favorite snacks and toys after the injection," pleaded Father.

I felt a little better hearing that, but I was still afraid of the injection. Finally, I had the injection. We stayed in Aunt's home in the township town for three days until the IVs ended.

Seven days later, my parents took me back to the clinic to have the stitches removed. My grandparents and one of my aunts came to the hospital to be with me. A female doctor led Father and me to a room where Father held me tightly in his arms as the stitches were taken out. In absolute terror, I screamed, "You are all merciless! Don't you have sympathy? Please don't do this to me!"

Although I didn't feel much pain, I screamed repeatedly in terror.

Several months later, my wound had healed, but my little finger wouldn't move easily. Scars are still obvious.

This accident affected me powerfully. I became quite fragile and soft-hearted and easily wept when encountering any sentimental event.

THE SPIRIT MEDIUM'S DEITY ARRIVES

In the late afternoon in 2006, my cousin and I returned from school about three kilometers from our homes. Three households separated her house from mine. I entered my family yard and saw several men in the living room. I hurriedly went to the kitchen, where my mother made dumplings stuffed with chopped mutton. I tossed my backpack on the adobe bed and asked, "Mother, who are those people in the living room?"

"The *lha ba* 'spirit medium', your father, and two other men. They're preparing for a ritual tonight."

"What? I'm afraid of *lha ba*! I won't participate," I declared worriedly. My previous attendance at a *lha ba* ritual had frightened me. A spear struck a participant in the back, and the *lha ba* had harshly scolded some people.

I was overwhelmed and disappointed that a *lha ba* was again in my home.

A few minutes later, Grandpa told my cousin and me to drive the livestock back from the pasture. We left reluctantly since it was far from our home.

We sang and scampered along a zigzag, narrow, stony lane. Cousin said, "Let's ride it," when we encountered a donkey.

I excitedly agreed. I lay on my belly across the donkey's back, my upper body hanging over one side and my legs dangling over the other. The donkey refused to move or bray. Its legs were seemingly attached to the earth. Cousin whipped it lightly with a tree branch, and it finally began moving forward, so we took turns riding the donkey.

I said with sudden concern, "Maybe its owner is looking for it."

"No worries!" Cousin assured nonchalantly.

Halfway to the pasture, we spotted two women wearing pink headscarves weeding a field in the distance. As we approached, they turned and looked at us, and one said, "That's my donkey."

Cousin immediately dismounted. We were too embarrassed to raise our heads and silently ran away.

Before we drove the cattle back, we counted all the cows, oxen, and calves to ensure none were missing. Among twelve, one calf and an ox belonged to Cousin's family.

On the way back, we tried to ride an ox several times, but it was wild. Eventually, Cousin successfully rode one and told me to ride behind her. When I mounted the ox, it began to run crazily, and I tumbled off. Fortunately, I wasn't injured since it was sandy ground.

Cousin stayed on the ox, which ran and bucked, but soon, she also fell off. I ran to her in concern. She was fine, and we both laughed, chatting excitedly about what had just happened.

At dusk, we returned home with our clothes, hair, and faces smudged with dust. After driving the cattle into the shed, we entered the courtyard, where the men had placed a massive pot in the center. The scene instantly reminded me of the previous *lha ba* ritual.

After dinner, neighbors and some locals arrived for the ritual. We sat on the ground together under my family's glass-enclosed porch. The *lha ba* was seated on an elevated seat with a felt cushion. He began by putting on a black robe with edges trimmed in thin, colorful, yellowish fabric. It seemed he had worn them for many years. He also wore a crown with Buddhist images, tied black tasseled headgear across his forehead, partly covering his face, fastened two pairs of small bells to each ankle, and began chanting a scripture.

My cousin and I clutched each other's hands in fear, unable to take our eyes off the *lha ba*. We believed he could see everything - our thoughts and movements - so we remained frozen. As he chanted, his body began trembling. He soon appeared visibly strained, swaying like he was about to collapse as Yul lha Deity possessed him.

Grandfather and Father stood on either side of him, ready to support him, gently beseeching the deity to calm down. Gradually, he became fully possessed, stopped shaking, and began melodically chanting a scripture. His head, body, and feet swayed slightly to the rhythm, accompanied by the soft tinkling of his ankle bells.

Grandfather asked questions that each participating family had prepared. The *lha ba* responded to each inquiry, though his words were unclear. A young man carefully recorded everything he said in a notebook. When the *lha ba* was asked about a local woman who had been ill for a long time, the young man noted down the *lha ba*'s explanation - the woman had unknowingly offended a naga spirit

in the family's summer pasture where several springs are located. Certain rituals needed to be performed for her to recover.

Later, the *lha ba* stood and walked to the pot filled with cooking oil. Grandfather asked the attendees to sit around it. We knelt close to the pot as the *lha ba* poured liquor into the oil, causing a large flame to flare up. If anyone hesitated to sit near the pot, the *lha ba* tapped them with his foot, urging them to move forward. He circled us, murmuring incantations and periodically pouring more liquor into the fire.

Eventually, we lined up and approached the *lha ba* one by one with the backs of our shirts rolled up. The *lha ba* would dip a black cloth into the oil and forcefully strike our backs to drive away misfortune and cleanse our bodies of negative influences.

When it was my uncle's turn, the *lha ba* noticed his long hair, asked for scissors, and cut it, shocking Cousin and me. We cautiously and silently approached the *lha ba*.

The *lha ba* returned to his normal state after the ritual. Everyone felt satisfied to have participated in such a significant ritual, as such opportunities were rare.

PART THREE
PHOTO ESSAYS

BON SKOR RELIGIOUS LIFE

This photo essay documents religious activities and sites in Bon skor Community. Key aspects of community religious life include creating Buddhist clay images for stupas, turning prayer wheels, and offering butter lamps and water at a local *ma Ni* Hall where annual community religious rituals are held. These practices play a significant role in fostering social cohesion and strengthening community bonds. Changes in local religious rituals are rapid, highlighting the value of this essay and its twenty-three images in recording local religious life in the first and second decades of the twenty-first century.

FIG 1. Lha sgron rgyal (b. 1970) and her sister, Lha mo mtsho (b. 1972), at their sister's (G.yang ris, b. 1977) home to help make Buddhist images. Bzang drug [88] is added to *sa dmar* 'red soil' collected from Gong kha [89] to make a clay mixture for Buddhist images. Cleanliness is of paramount concern when involved in this activity. Participants wash their hands and wear disposable gloves and masks to avoid contaminating the clay. Chunks of clay are put in plastic bags until the next day to make kneading the clay easier (26 July 2022, Rdo rje dpal 'byor).[90]

[88] A medicinal, purifying powder made from six precious substances used in religious activities.
[89] A rich source of red soil in Mang ra County. Local *bla ma* consecrated that area and asked residents to use it to make images.
[90] Rdo rje dpal 'byor, G.yang byam skyid, and G.yang ris took the photos in this essay in 2017 and 2022.

FIG 2. The following day, the three siblings (mentioned above) and their sister-in-law, Gnam mtsho skyid (1986), pounded the clay with rubber mallets until it was smooth, thin, and flat. *Gzungs gzhug*[91] was placed under the clay, and *sku dpar*[92] was carefully positioned atop the flat clay pieces. One hand gripped the mold handle while the other struck the handle top with a mallet to imprint the images. Afterward, a sharpened piece of wood was used to remove excess clay around the clay images. A mold required frequent brushing and rubbing with canola oil to limit the clay sticking to the mold to ensure clear images. Lha sgron rgyal (top right) holds a *sku dpar* (27 July 2022, Rdo rje dpal 'byor).

[91] It generally referred to a few barley grains at the back of every image. High-ranking *bla ma* or monks gave specific instructions. Papers with mantras were also used.

[92] A copper mold was used to make clay images.

FIG 3. Four women use a *tshe lha rnam gsum*[93] mold to create images. Four images were simultaneously made on clay with less time and effort, and less soil was needed. The image features three divinities of longevity: Tshe dpag med at the top with two stupas on each side, Sgrol dkar on the left, and Gtsug tor rnam rgyal ma to the right (27 July 2022, Rdo rje dpal 'byor).

[93] Three divinities of longevity: Tshe dpag med (Amitayus), Sgrol dkar (White Tara), and Gtsug tor rnam rgyal ma (Namgyalma) https://rywiki.tsadra.org/index.php/tshe_lha_rnam_gsum, 3 October 2022.

FIG 4. This *sku dpar* belonged to Rnam 'bu's (b. 1972) family, who purchased it for 500 RMB in a shop in Khri ka (Guide) that sold Buddhist-related items in 2014. Rnam 'bu made the *thod dkar* 'elm' frame. The metal end of the wooden handle reduced wear. A steel wire prevented cracking (27 July 2022, Rdo rje dpal 'byor).

FIG 5. One thousand three hundred images of Tshe lha rnam gsum were dried for about twenty days before being placed in a stupa under construction at Ba kyA Monastery.[94] Other local families each voluntarily made over 1,000 images to accumulate merit, stay safe, have long lives, and repel illness and bad fortune. Monks from Ba kyA are often invited to chant in local homes. Residents also sponsored the construction of a Ba kyA Assembly Hall and prayer wheels (27 July 2022, Rdo rje dpal 'byor).

[94] Ba kyA dgon dar rgyas gling is located in Ba kyA Village, sixteen kilometers from Khri ka County Town. According to Nian and Bai (1993:189), it is a branch of La mo bde chen Monastery of Gcan tsha (Jianzha), a county in Rma lho (Huangnan) Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, Mtsho sngon Province. However, the local monks I consulted on 4 October 2022 told me the monastery was founded in 1827 by the second 'Ja' mo dkon mchog bstan 'dzin nyi ma (1791-1854). A lags snying nge was assigned to be the *bla ma* of this monastery in 1827. There were twenty monks in 2022. See Smith (2017:70) for a photo of the monastery.

FIG 6. This image of Mi 'khrugs pa (Rgyal ba mi 'khrugs pa), a supreme Buddhist being, is surrounded by a mantra locals chanted to eliminate sins. Rnam 'bu's family made 1,000 images to put inside a stupa at the local nunnery[95] in the spring of 2022. Locals believed making this image helped eliminate misdeeds such as killing animals and harming other living creatures. Buddhist images such as Sgrol ma 'Tara', Ao rgyan rin po che (Padmasambhava 'Born from a Lotus'), and Tshe lha rnam gsum were also made based on what was required (2022, G.yang byams skyid).

[95] Bon skor jo mo dgon pa 'Bon skor Nunnery' had thirty nuns in 2022 and was located seven kilometers from the farming section of Bon skor. According to a local nun, it was founded in 2014. It was subsidiary to Tho le Monastery (Tho le dgon rnam rgyal phun tshogs chos rdzong gling), which was originally located in the Tho le area near the Rma chu in the northwest of Mang ra County, thirty-nine kilometers from the County Town. Founded by Dge 'dun bstan pa dar rgyas in 1916, it was a branch monastery of La mo bde chen Monastery. In 1984, after the construction of Tshal rnga 'Longyangxia' Reservoir, the monastery was relocated to the northwest of the contemporary Mang ra Township. The monastery had thirty-four monks and one incarnation *bla ma* (Nian and Bai 1993:201).

FIG 7. These *gzungs gzhug* are for the Mi 'khrugs pa images. Mi 'khrugs pa mantras were wrapped with pine needles and *dar tshon sna lnga* 'threads of five colors' (yellow, red, green, white, blue) symbolizing *'byung ba lnga* 'the five elements' (earth, water, fire, air, space). A small hole was made at the back of the image in the heart area where the *gzungs gzhug* were placed inside. The opening was covered with clay (2022, G.yang byams skyid).

FIG 8. Lha sgron rgyal and G.yang ris used a mold with one hundred images of Klu dbang ryal bo 'Naga King'[96]/'Nagaraja'[97] to make the 100,000 images required to build a *'bum khang*.[98] They ate no meat, garlic, or onion while engaged in this effort. Eating meat when associated with rituals involving water deities was forbidden in fear of offending these deities, as does the strong smell of garlic and onion. The women who made these clay images had health issues. One had rheumatoid arthritis, and the other often suffered from joint pain. *Mo ba* 'diviners' and local *bla ma* they consulted said they had offended *klu* 'naga'. Consequently, their families often asked monks or *sngags pa* 'tantric practitioners' to chant scriptures and hold rituals related to water deities that might help them improve. Both had collected firewood in a valley and played at water sources as children, which they believed had offended *klu*.

Images they made were used to construct a *'bum khang* near the community where a monk had designated a spring and selected a day for the ritual. Since it was a *klu*-related ritual, it was done on a *klu thebs* day – a day *klu* emerged from their retreats.

On the fifteenth day of the fifth lunar month of 2022, relatives carried clay images to the designated area with a water source at the upper side of the spring. A huge new fabric piece was spread on the ground, clay images were stacked on it, and the monk chanted. When it rained, the images disintegrated and flowed into the water source (2022, G.yang ris).

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[96] Nagas were considered serpent spirits or as animals or demi-gods living beneath the earth's surface, in water, and in trees or rocks. Endowed with magical powers and wealth, they were responsible for certain illnesses transmitted to humans https://www.rigpawiki.org/index.php?title=Naga, 23 December 2022.

[97] Nagaraja's relationships with the nagas and spirits of the waterways, oceans, lakes, and the underworld explain why he was especially worshipped when diseases believed to be caused by nagas arose https://www.himalayanart.org/items/24075, 23 December 2024.

[98] A religious practice requiring at least 100,000 clay images of one Buddha that were buried, or sometimes put in a stupa-like structure, with a monk's or several monks' help. A *bla ma* might also have been engaged in chanting during the ritual.

FIG 9. This Klu dbang rgyal bo mold featured a stupa on either side with mantras around the image. Lha sgron rgya bought it in 2021 at the suggestion of a monk responsible for making *'bum khang* near a water source. He said it was better to make images with a mold that had a single clear image since the mold with a hundred images was unclear, so Lha sgron rgya bought it. This mold was also used to make *chu dpar*' water images' when the mold was repeatedly put into the water and removed. This was often practiced by locals near a spring or in a river. Lha sgron rgya and her sister made 300 images using this mold for a *'bum khang* (27 July 2022, Rdo rje dpal 'byor).

FIG 10. The local *ma Ni* Hall is in the community's farming area. In 2016, the courtyard and gate were rebuilt with local contributions and community and religious leader management. A concrete road and steps were built, streetlamps were installed, and poplar and pine trees were planted around the yard. A stone lion was on either side of the steps (4 August 2022, Rdo rje dpal 'byor).

FIG 11. Prayer flags are on the back mountain as morning fog swirls around the *ma Ni* Hall. Rooms (L-R): a communal kitchen often used to cook for those who turned prayer wheels and participated in collective religious rituals such as fasting, chanting scriptures, and rituals to accumulate *tshogs* 'merit'.[99] The middle room allowed locals to sit and turn the prayer wheels and had seats and tables for meals. The green tile-roofed room had four large prayer wheels. Buddhist images and scriptures were on the shelves. Other rooms included a *'du khang* 'Assembly Hall', and five additional kitchens (one for each of the community's five brigades; six kitchens in total).

[99] A ritual held on the tenth and twenty-fifth days of each lunar month. Participants accumulated merit by chanting during this ritual.

A room made from sheet metal was for offering *mchd me* 'butter lamps' (4 August 2022, Rdo rje dpal 'byor).

FIG 12. The *ma Ni* Hall had four prayer wheels. One contained one hundred million *ma Ni* script[100] built after the Culture Revolution, when locals were at the community's former location (Bon po zhing kha).[101] The prayer wheel was brought to the current resettled location, and a small *ma Ni* room was built where the only prayer wheel was occasionally turned. Three prayer wheels made in Chab cha (Qiabuqia)[102] with community patronage began to be rotated in the farming area on 15 October 2007. The prayer wheels have the *gzung gzhug* of the *Thar mdo 'Liberation Scripture' Rdo rje gcod pa*,[103] and thirty different mantras. Each household spun the prayer wheels twenty-four hours without pause once every nineteen months, since there were 570

[100] The six syllables of the Avalokitesvara mantra are *oM ma Ni pad+me hUM*.
[101] Twenty kilometers from the current location and now submerged in Tshal rnga Reservoir.
[102] The capital of Mtsho lho Prefecture.
[103] The *Vajra Cutter Sutra* or *Diamond Sutra* https://www.rigpawiki.org/index.php?title=Vajra_Cutter_Sutra, 23 December 2024.

households. In the event of a community member's death, the deceased's family could turn the prayer wheels (4 August 2022, Rdo rje dpal 'byor).

FIG 13. Images of Ao rgyan rin po che (L), Thugs rje chen po (R), and other images on the shelves, along with the multi-volume *Bka' 'gyur*[104] and *Bstan 'gyur*.[105] *Thang kha* and images of high-ranking *bla ma* were also displayed. Religious personages featured in photos were the ninth La mo gser khri chos kyi blo gros (b. 1969) (l) and the ninth La mo zhabs drung dkar po blo bzang bstan' dzin chos kyi rgyal mtshan (b. 1992) (r). Lamps and flickering artificial flowers were provided as offerings. Community members tied these scripture volumes to their backs with sashes on the eighth day of the sixth lunar month annually and circumambulated once around the community's farmland and houses. This required about six hours (4 August 2022, Rdo rje dpal 'byor).

[104] Tibetan translations of the Buddha's teachings https://www.rigpawiki.org/index.php?title=Kangyur, 23 December 2024.
[105] Commentaries on the Buddha's teachings https://www.rigpawiki.org/index.php?title=Tengyur, 23 December 2022.

FIG 14. Two local elders spun prayer wheels surrounding the *ma Ni* Hall. Religious leaders installed the prayer wheels with community members' financial support in 2016. Elders were the most frequent visitors, circumambulating, chanting, and prostrating. They especially visited on the first, eighth, tenth, fifteenth, eighteenth, twenty-first, twenty-fifth, and thirtieth days of each lunar month. They prayed for good health, longevity, harmony between people, and removing misfortune. Locals lacquered the wheels when they lost paint, which was considered a great religious contribution (4 August 2022, Rdo rje dpal 'byor).

FIG 15. Bsod nams tshe bstan's family prepared butter for lamps, food, and water when it was their turn to spin the prayer wheels. At seven AM on 4 August 2022, Bsod nams tshe bstan and his wife, Khro mo, packed items in their car and traveled to the *ma Ni* Hall, where they took over from another family. Around nine AM, residents came to turn the prayer wheels, pulling on leather straps attached to the prayer wheels in another room. Locals often helped each other spin prayer wheels and, in return, had helpers when it was their turn. Helpers were needed, especially at night. They usually made groups of two or three and divided the hours for each group to turn the prayer wheels at night. Fruits, beverages, and snacks were often offered to the helpers. Locals gossiped if the prayer wheels stopped rotating (4 August 2022, Rdo rje dpal 'byor).

FIG 16. Lha sgrong rgya made *gro 'bras* 'wild yam rice' - wild yams, raisins, melted butter, and white granulated sugar with rice. The family responsible for prayer wheels on a certain day often offered lunch to those who helped turn the prayer wheels. *Rtsam pa*, cheese, butter, *gro 'bras*, and yogurt were typically provided. Eating meat in the *ma Ni* Hall was taboo (4 August 2022, Rdo rje dpal 'byor).

FIG 17. Khro mo fills disposable bowls with *hub ser*[106] 'cold wheat-flour noodles' drained and mixed with salt, oil, fried chopped *ke'u* 'chives', *sgog chu* 'minced garlic with liquid', vinegar, and chili powder, according to individual taste. Lha sgron rgyal and Lha mo mtsho also prepared tea and bread for lunch (4 August 2022, Rdo rje dpal 'byor).

[106] *Hub ser* is CT for a type of cold noodle.

FIG 18. Lunch. *'O ja* 'milk tea', *ja nag* 'black tea', *cung rdog*[107] 'steamed buns', *go re dmar po* 'fried bread', and fruit (watermelon, peaches) were on trays. Everyone was offered *rtsam pa, gro 'bras*, yogurt, and cold noodles based on their preference (4 August 2022, Rdo rje dpal 'byor).

FIG 19. A *bsang khri*[108] in the *ma Ni* Hall courtyard. The manager burned incense every morning to worship deities. Locals burned incense during religious rituals. They first made a fire with cow dung. When it stopped smoking, *bsang rtsi* 'incense material[109] was added. Tea or liquor was sprinkled on the incense and to the sky to beseech the deities for blessings and protection (4 August 2022, Rdo rje dpal 'byor).

[107] CT.
[108] A brick platform for burning *bsang* 'incense'.
[109] LT: *bsang rdzas* consisting of juniper leaves, barley flour (main ingredients), granulated sugar, and fruit.

FIG 20. The *mchod pa* 'water-offerings' platform. The Buddhist images and decorations on the wall were made in 2022. The water offering ritual was initiated in 2017 after 2,500 *kong bu* 'butter lamp vessels', and 1,500 *dong bur* [110] 'water-offering bowls' were purchased with local contributions. Bzhi b'i smyung gnas 'Fasting Rite of the Fourth Month',[111] was held from the twenty-ninth day of the third lunar month to the fifteenth of the fourth lunar month. Mostly women residents fasted for sixteen days[112] at the *ma Ni* Hall. Households were divided into *gshog ka* 'groups' of twenty to forty

[110] LT: *mchod kong*.

[111] See Pad+ma rig 'dzin (2021:47-73) for a description of an A mdo Smyung gnas.

[112] A fasting ritual typically held for two days. On the first day, participants were free to have lunch and a cup of milk tea in the evening. On the second day, participants only chanted and were forbidden to have food and drink, and talk with others, which continued until the next morning. At dawn, they had *thor thug* 'sweet milk-flour soup'. This sixteen-day ritual consisted of eight fasting periods locals referred to as *smyung gnas chog brgyad* 'eight fasting rituals'. Participants practiced based on their ability and time. They were not required to fast a certain number of times. Some fasted for sixteen days, while others fasted intermittently.

households based on family, *tsho ba* 'clan', or random assignment. Each group made water offerings, offering butter lamps, and serving those fasting for two days (4 August 2022, Rdo rje dpal 'byor).

FIG 21. A group of people offered water with kettles in the *ma Ni* Hall. The water-offering receptacles were put in order in straight lines. The space between bowls ideally was the size of a barley grain. Water was carefully poured into the bowls without spilling.[113] Five to ten minutes passed once all the bowls were filled. The bowls were then emptied and rubbed with a cloth. This process was repeated to offer as much water as possible. Klu mo rgyal (b. 1965) said, "Around 10,000 bowls of water can be offered a day if many people are involved."

As the local saying goes:

[113] According to a community resident, Lha sgron, an appropriate amount of water would be poured into the offering bowls. If the bowl overflowed, the person responsible was in danger of losing control of their saliva or mucus flow in the next life. If the water was too little, a very poor next life was possible.

TEXT AS SPOKEN

ཡར་དཀོན་མཆོག་ཀ་མཆོད་པ།

མར་དབུལ་བོར་སྦྱིན་པ།

yar dkon mchog ga mchod pa,

mar dbul bor sbyin pa.

LITERARY POETIC TEXT

ཡར་དཀོན་མཆོག་ལ་མཆོད་པ།

མར་དབུལ་བོ་ལ་སྦྱིན་པ།

yar dkon mchog la mchod pa,

mar dbul bo la sbyin pa.

ENGLISH TRANSLATION

Provide offerings to the Jewels,[114]

Offer donations to impoverished people.

Water offerings help prevent famine and bring wealth to the next life (2017, Rdo rje dpal 'byor)

[114] The Three Jewels (the Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha).

FIG 22. A local elder melted *mchod mar* 'butter for offering' (margarine bought from the township town used to make *mchod me*). Locals often offered butter lamps at the *ma Ni* Hall during rituals (4 August 2022, Rdo rje dpal 'byor).

FIG 23. Women made *mchod me* in a room built for lit butter lamps. They first made *sdong ras* 'wicks' (thin *sdong rtswa* 'grass stalks' wrapped with cotton). The length and thickness depended on the size of the butter lamp vessel. The end of the wick in the small hole at the vessel's center was thicker than the upper part. Melted butter was poured into the butter lamp vessel and on the wick so it would readily light. Butter lamp vessel names were based on their size. For example, a *mtshan thub* was a butter lamp that burned all night, and a *tshe 'bar* was a large one that burned for around ten days and nights (4 August 2022, Rdo rje dpal 'byor).

BREAD-MAKING AND FOOD DISPLAYS[115]

This photo essay highlights reciprocal labor relationships among local women, showcasing bread-making and dumpling preparation for celebrations such as Lo sar and weddings. It features traditional Tibetan cakes for ceremonies and provides photographic illustrations of food displays. It also explores bread types traditionally prepared before Lo sar and various local uses. Women often assist other families with bread-making in a spirit of reciprocity, creating a productive and joyful atmosphere. This custom gradually disappeared as Lo sar bread became widely available in the local township.

Historically, cooking oil was scarce, and locals developed practices to reflect its value during bread-making. For instance, large quantities of bread were made before celebrations, and oil was referred to as *chu* 'water', because of the belief that directly mentioning *snum* 'oil' would cause it to be consumed more quickly. Additionally, a dough-made *sbal ba* 'frog' was placed at the edge of the pot, as frogs were thought to help retain oil due to their association with water.

Silence was also emphasized during bread-making. Children were forbidden to be present because the noise was believed to increase oil consumption. The entrance of the yak-hair tent was kept closed, with the belief that retaining the smoke from the oil would help conserve it. These practices became less common after 2008 when locals gained greater access to cooking oil.

Food displays are central to celebrations and weddings, adding to the festive atmosphere, symbolizing hospitality, and aesthetic value.

[115] See https://archive.org/details/am-do-tibetan-women-make-lo-sar-new-year-bread for local women making bread for the Tibetan New Year festival period, accessed 12 November 2024.

FIG 1. A sgrol (b. 1981, center) was a family's daughter-in-law. She and two helpers (Tshe gzungs skyid, b. 1985 and Gnam mtsho skyid, b. 1986) prepared bread for Lo sar at A sgrol's home. A sgrol's mother-in-law, Bsod yag skyid (b. 1963), fried bread in canola oil on a modern metal coal-burning stove. When Lo sar approached, women often worked together, taking turns helping each other's families. This collaborative approach was common among local families, especially before Lo sar or weddings and other ceremonies requiring large amounts of prepared food. Bread-making required about four hours. Meanwhile, women often gathered in the evenings to make dumplings at a home, since their daytime hours were occupied with family chores and livestock (19 January 2023, Rdo rje dpal 'byor).

FIG 2. Local families prepared a variety of breads before Lo sar. Here, A sgrol made *chos mdun*,[116] a bread she was skilled at, preparing it for frying. She made bread shaped like a dragon, sheep, pig, tiger, and chicken, representing the zodiac animals of her family members' birth years. A camel was also included, a common addition despite not being one of the twelve zodiac signs because it was believed to embody traits from each sign: snake eyes, horse ears, pig's tail, dragon's neck, rabbit's mouth, and so forth.[117] Making these animal-shaped breads for Lo sar was a cherished local custom (19 January 2023, Rdo rje dpal 'byor).

[116] Bread put before Buddhist images and scriptures in a shrine room.
[117] Women I consulted heard elders say this when they were children, but only remembered several.

FIG 3. A sgro makes *rgyal bo*.[118] There were several types of *rgal bo*. She made a circular one with six extended segments that usually were even-numbered - four, six, eight, or ten. Once shaped, a *rgyal dphar*[119] was used to press patterns onto the *rgyal bo*. These breads were not intended for consumption but were displayed in front of Buddhist images and scriptures in the shrine room. From the first day of the first lunar month until the fifteenth day (the end of the Lo sar period), several *rgyal bo* breads were burned for *bsang* 'incense' offerings in the morning on a *bsang khri* 'incense altar'. On Lo sar's final day, the remaining *rgyal bo* and *chos mdun* were burned in a ritual to bid farewell to Lo sar. Locals purchased bread in 2024 in the local township town rather than making it at home. However, bread like *rgyal bo* and *chus mdun* were not for commercial sale, so they were still made at home (19 January 2023, Rdo rje dpal 'byor).

FIG 4. Bread in the sieve was locally called *go re dmar po* 'red bread' or *go re leb tse* 'flat bread' and commonly used to create *sder kha* 'food displays on plates'. Bsod yag skyid explained that these breads were traditionally prepared for Lo sar and often were a base under meat on display plates at a time when candy and fruit were not part

[118] Literaly, "king."
[119] A small rolling pin with carved patterns at both sides of its end used to imprint patterns on *rgyal bo* and *chus mdun*.

of Lo sar offerings, unlike in 2024, when a wider variety of foods were available.

Reflecting on her childhood, Bsod yag skyid noted how customs have evolved. Historically, women made bread in black yak-hair tents using a traditional Tibetan adobe stove. Although the tents were filled with smoke, the entrances were kept closed, as this was believed to help conserve the oil used for frying bread, a scarce resource. Silence was emphasized during bread-making, and children were not allowed nearby. Additionally, a dough-shaped frog was placed at the edge of the pot to prevent the oil from running out.

Traditionally, the amount of bread made was far greater than what families make today, with bread-making starting early in the morning and continuing into the night. A family made a huge amount of *go re dmar po* to last through the first lunar month. Locals believed finishing the bread too early was unfavorable.

Bsod yag skyid held a strainer, straining the oil from the fried bread. Traditionally, people referred to cooking oil as *chu* 'water' rather than 'oil', and the woman in charge was expected to sieve the oil carefully and was praised if she conserved it well. These practices are no longer commonly observed.

Bsod yag skyid also recalled visiting families during Lo sar as a child and taking typical *lo rgyal*[120] of two *go re dmar po* and a *rgyal bo* on top, tied with sheep wool. Visitors presented this gift with greetings upon arriving at a home, and the host returned it when they departed. Today, however, these gifts have changed. People now give items such as ash-baked bread, cash, yogurt, wine, barley-made liquor, and other beverages as Lo sar gifts (19 January 2023, Rdo rje dpal 'byor).

[120] Literally, 'New Year king' refers to the bread locals bring when visiting families during the New Year. This bread is returned when they leave.

FIG 5. The dough for *go re slas ma* 'braided bread' differs from others. It is mixed with oil and sugar, giving it a sweet, crispy taste. Such bread did not exist traditionally. It emerged later under the influence of Chinese and Muslim merchants. Locals commonly use this bread for ceremonial food displays during various ceremonies (19 January 2023, Rdo rje dpal 'byor).

FIG 6. Ash-baked bread, smeared with a bit of butter, that my family received from a relative in Khri ka(Guide) County during the 2023 Tibetan Lunar New Year. Sometimes, a piece of sheep wool is attached to it (23 January 2023, Rdo rje dpal 'byor).

FIG 7. My mother smears butter (a local custom) on *chos mdun* that we made before placing them in the shrine room (31 January 2022, Rdo rje dpal 'byor).

FIG 8. Local women helped my Uncle Mkhar rgyal's (b. 1968) family make *tshod ma* 'steamed dumplings' for the wedding ceremony of my cousin, Dpal ldan nyi ma (b. 1988), whose fiancée was a Mongolian from Hohhot. Since the wedding was planned for his home, much food was prepared. Only women made 400 steamed stuffed buns in the morning. Men minced the meat for the dumpling fillings (28 January 2023, Rdo rje dpal 'byor).

FIG 9. My mother made this *thud* for the wedding of my cousin, Dpal ldan nyi ma, with flour, shredded cheese, butter, *gro ma* 'wild yams', raisins, and sugar (28 January 2023, Rdo rje dpal 'byor).

FIG 10. My mother made these *zhun* with cheese, butter, *gro ma, rtsam pa*, and sugar for the wedding of my cousin, Dpal ldan nyi ma (29 January 2023, Rdo rje dpal 'byor).

FIG 11. My mother and I made yak meat dumplings. The ones on the left are for boiling, and the ones on the right are for steaming. Locals typically prepare these foods (20 January 2023, Rdo rje dpal 'byor).

FIG 12. These two zodiac images (L, a dragon; R, a horse) with imprints of *rgyal dpar* my mother made for Lo sar were placed in our home's shrine room (18 January 2023, Rdo rje dpal 'byor).

FIG 13. This *sder kha* was prepared for Uncle Gnam 'bu's son's (Mkha yag 'bum's, 1996) wedding. It included a variety of beverages, including alcoholic drinks, cigarettes, fruits, bread, and candies. *Sder kha* was a significant aspect of local customs, symbolizing ceremony and hospitality. The first plate on the right was *mgron mgo* 'head of *sder kha*', unique to weddings. This plate was typically more elaborately prepared than other plates with apples and two layers of *zhun* in the center, a box of liquor, and a *kha btags* on top.

Traditionally, this display featured two or three sheep *tshang ra* 'rump with the tail attached', bounded by sheep wool and *kha btags*, with a small juniper bunch on top. *A zhang*[121] from the bride's family sat by the *sder kha*. The *a zhang* who sat by the *mgron mgo* was usually an older, respected man with a harmonious and complete family and children and was offered the *mgron mgo* as a gift. Locals rarely followed this custom in 2024. Other gifts like bottles of liquor, cash, and *gos* 'fabric' were given instead[122] (23 February 2023, Rdo rje dpal 'byor).

[121] Part of the bride's entourage consisting of close male relatives of the bride's mother and father.
[122] Tshe gzungs skyid provided this information.

CONCLUSION

Lived experiences of the older generation are often untold and unrecorded. Once they pass away, their stories may be lost forever. Understanding our own culture is essential to understanding who we are. By learning from the experiences of our ancestors, we are better equipped to navigate the future while preserving and honoring our heritage.

In 2025, we are exposed to a broad spectrum of global culture, rapid modernization, and technological advancement that collectively can create a sense of inferiority regarding traditional culture. As a result, people may begin to assimilate mainstream cultures without fully considering the long-term impact on their own traditions.

Although Tibetan culture is taught in schools, it is often limited to the history of kings, dynasties, and religious figures, overlooking the rich cultural practices of ordinary Tibetans. This narrow focus diminishes the value of local traditions and fosters a sense of insignificance in our cultural heritage. As a consequence, many individuals unwittingly embrace modernization without understanding the potential consequences it may have on their way of life.

I am committed to further improving my skills and continuing my exploration of the lives of Tibetan women. Many other facets of rural Tibetan women's lives warrant deeper investigation. For example, how do cultural norms, religious beliefs, and societal expectations influence how women speak, behave, dress, and navigate their emotions and personal relationships? How do local political, medical, and social systems impact women's healthcare access and outcomes? How do education and the evolving social landscape shape women's careers and ambitions?

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APPENDIX 1: QUESTIONS THAT THE WOMEN WERE ASKED IN TIBETAN ABOUT MENOPAUSE

1. How is menopause understood or discussed in your community?
2. Did you talk to other women who had experienced menopause? Did their experiences influence your understanding or approach?
3. Was it easy to access medical care for menopause-related concerns?
4. What symptoms did you experience during or before menopause? Did you seek medical advice? If so, how did doctors deal with it?
5. Did you experience symptoms like hot flashes, sleeplessness, depression, anxiety, memory issues, and mood swings?
6. Did you share your experiences or symptoms with anyone during menopause?
7. How long did your symptoms last?
8. Did menopausal symptoms or discomfort affect your daily life? If so, how?
9. At what age did you experience menopause?
10. Do women in your community consider menopause an important issue?
11. Was menopause a challenging experience for you?
12. Did you feel worried or anxious about the onset of menopause?
13. Did your family, friends, or community support you during menopause?
14. Can traditional methods or remedies be used locally to manage menopausal symptoms?

APPENDIX 2: WEBLINKS

Modified version of images from (top)
https://www.travelchinaguide.com/map/china_map.htm,

(center)
https://image.baidu.com/search/detail?ct=503316480&z=0&ipn=d&word=%E9%9D%92%E6%B5%B7%E7%9C%81%E7%BA%A7%E5%9C%B0%E5%9B%BE&step_word=&hs=0&pn=10&spn=0&di=7416423379248349185&pi=0&rn=1&tn=baiduimagedetail&is=0%2C0&istype=2&ie=utf-8&oe=utf-8&in=&cl=2&lm=-1&st=-1&cs=3160542403%2C1893530686&os=2321238401%2C4110883032&simid=3160542403%2C1893530686&adpicid=0&lpn=0&ln=1627&fr=&fmq=1732089380978_R&fm=detail&ic=&s=undefined&hd=&latest=&copyright=&se=&sme=&tab=0&width=&height=&face=undefined&ist=&jit=&cg=&bdtype=0&oriquery=&objurl=https%3A%2F%2Fimg.doc.xuehai.net%2Fpic%2F738ef2c99399aa5719f543ac83865410199052c3%2F1-540-jpg_6-960-0-0-960.jpg&fromurl=ippr_z2C%24qAzdH3FAzdH3F15v_z%26e3Bx7jiwt_z%26e3BgjpAzdH3Fkonbjudvllnllwwc08luc9nwvbnbmc98a8llacdvn_z%26e3Bip4s&gsm=1e&rpstart=0&rpnum=0&islist=&querylist=&nojc=undefined&dyTabStr=MCwzLDEsMiwxMyw3LDYsNSwxMiw5&lid=9777985314681668522

(bottom)
https://www.bing.com/images/search?view=detailV2&ccid=FxO5Iauc&id=BBE7A9A9D2D9DD0D1864416EEF99BD5F673E0E10&thid=OIP.FxO5Iauc3XH1VqmrRhVawwHaEK&mediaurl=https%3A%2F%2Fimg.51wendang.com%2Fpic%2F4b7c2bd85b984958ca1dc190bd6542823c250334%2F1-540-jpg_6-960-0-0-960.jpg&exph=540&expw=960&q=???????????&form=IRPRST&ck=5E90055DF6C9FD7D3A9B65D4C201A971&selectedindex=25&itb=0&cw=1323&ch=755&ajaxhist=0&ajaxserp=0&vt=0&sim=11

'bru khral འབྲུ་ཁྲལ།
'brug skyid འབྲུག་སྐྱིད།
'byor med yar langs འབྱོར་མེད་ཡར་ལངས།
'byung ba lnga འབྱུང་བ་ལྔ།
'bum khang འབུམ་ཁང་།
'du khang འདུ་ཁང་།
'dzong khug འཛོང་ཁུག།
'ja' mo dkon mchog bstan 'dzin nyi ma འཇའ་མོ་དཀོན་མཆོག་བསྟན་འཛིན་ཉི་མ།
'o ja འོ་ཇ།
'ol se nyer lnga འོལ་སེ་ཉེར་ལྔ།
'pho ba འཕོ་བ།
a gar so lnga ཨ་གར་སོ་ལྔ།
a lags snying nge ཨ་ལག་སྙིང་དེ།
a mdo ཨ་མདོ།
a rig lha khang ཨ་རིག་ལྷ་ཁང་།
a sgrol ཨ་སྒྲོལ།
Avalokitesvara, spyan ras gzigs སྤྱན་རས་གཟིགས།
a zhang ཨ་ཞང་།
ba kyA dgon dar rgyas gling བ་ཀྱ་དགོན་དར་རྒྱས་གླིང་།
bad kan བད་ཀན།
bang chu བང་ཆུ།
bang lud བང་ལྗད།
bang rtsag བང་རྩག
bar do བར་དོ།
be len བེ་ལེན།
bka' 'gyur བཀའ་འགྱུར།
bla brang ཟླ་ཁང་།
bla ma ཟླ་མ།
bon po zhing kha བོན་པོ་ཞིང་ཁ།
bon skor བོན་སྐོར།
bon skor jo mo dgon pa བོན་སྐོར་ཇོ་མོ་དགོན་པ།
bsang བསང་།
bsang chu བསང་ཆུ།
bsang khri བསང་ཁྲི།
bsang rdzas བསང་རྫས།

bsang rtsi བསང་རྩི།
bsod b+he བསོད་ཉེ།
bsod nams che བསོད་ནམས་ཆེ།
bsod nams chung བསོད་ནམས་ཆུང་།
bsod nams dman བསོད་ནམས་དམན།
bsod nams rab brtan བསོད་ནམས་རབ་བརྟན།
bsod nams rgyal བསོད་ནམས་རྒྱལ།
bsod nams tshe bstan བསོད་ནམས་ཚེ་བསྟན།
bsod yag skyid བསོད་ཡག་སྐྱིད།
btsun pa rgyal བཙུན་པ་རྒྱལ།
btsun kho བཙུན་ཁོ།
bu rogs བུ་རོགས།
bya khyung dgon pa བྱ་ཁྱུང་དགོན་པ།
bya khyung rdo rje phag mo བྱ་ཁྱུང་རྡོ་རྗེ་ཕག་མོ།
bya khyung yon tan dar rgyas gling བྱ་ཁྱུང་ཡོན་ཏན་དར་རྒྱས་གླིང་།
bya mdo བྱ་མདོ།
byams skyid བྱམས་སྐྱིད།
bzang drug བཟང་དྲུག
bzang mo བཟང་མོ།
bzo zhing བཟོ་ཞིང་།
bzhi b'i smyung gnas བཞི་བའི་སྨྱུང་གནས།
chab cha ཆབ་ཆ།
chos mdun ཆོས་མདུན།
chos rje don grub rin chen ཆོས་རྗེ་དོན་གྲུབ་རིན་ཆེན།
chu ཆུ།
chu dkar dkar ཆུ་དཀར་དཀར།
chu dpar ཆུ་དཔར།
chu nag nag ཆུ་ནག་ནག
chu ring ཆུ་རིང་།
cung rdog ཆུང་རྡོག (CT)
dar tshon sna lnga དར་ཚོན་སྣ་ལྔ།
dba' sha དབའ་ཤ
dbang chen དབང་ཆེན
dbus gtsang དབུས་གཙང་།
dge 'dun bstan pa dar rgyas དགེ་འདུན་བསྟན་པ་དར་རྒྱས།
dge lugs དགེ་ལུགས།
dgon thang དགོན་ཐང་།

Dharma, chos ཆོས།
dkar me དཀར་མེ།
dmigs brtse ma དམིགས་བཙེ་མ།
dong bur དོང་བུར།
dpa' mtsho དཔའ་མཚོ།
dpa' mtsho skyid དཔའ་མཚོ་སྐྱིད།
dpal bzang rgyal mtsho དཔལ་བཟང་རྒྱལ་མཚོ།
dpal ldan nyi ma དཔལ་ལྡན་ཉི་མ།
dpon tshang དཔོན་ཚང་།
g.yang byams skyid གཡང་བྱམས་སྐྱིད།
g.yang ris གཡང་རིས།
gcan tsha གཅན་ཚ།
gces ming གཅེས་མིང་།
gcod pa གཅོད་པ།
gnam mtsho skyid གནམ་མཚོ་སྐྱིད།
go re dmar po གོ་རེ་དམར་པོ།
go re leb tse གོ་རེ་ལེབ་རྩེ
go re slas ma གོ་རེ་སྨས་མ།
gong kha གོང་ཁ།
gos གོས།
gos rdzod གོས་རྫོད།
gro 'bras སྐྲོ་འབྲས།
gro ma སྐྲོ་མ།
gri sha གྲི་ཤ
grang gzhi གྲང་གཞི།
grib གྲིབ།
gro 'bras སྐྲོ་འབྲས།
gshog ka གཤོག་ཀཱ།
gsang sgrog གསང་སྒྲོག
gter གཏེར།
gser chen གསེར་ཆེན།
gser gdung གསེར་གདུང་།
gtsug tor rnam rgyal ma གཙུག་ཏོར་རྣམ་རྒྱལ་མ།
gur kum གུར་ཀུམ།
g.yu thog gsar ma yon tan mgon po གཡུ་ཐོག་གསར་མ་ཡོན་ཏན་མགོན་པོ།
g.yu thog rnying ma yon tan mgon po གཡུ་ཐོག་རྙིང་མ་ཡོན་ཏན་མགོན་པོ།
g.yu thog yon tan mgon po གཡུ་ཐོག་ཡོན་ཏན་མགོན་པོ།

gzin rje chos rgyal གཟིན་རྗེ་ཆོས་རྒྱལ།
gzhug གཞུག
gzungs gzhug གཟུངས་གཞུག
hub ser ཧུབ་སེར (CT)
ja nag ཇ་ནག
jo jo lha khang ཇོ་ཇོ་ལྷ་ཁང་།
jo khang ཇོ་ཁང་།
jo mo dgon pa ཇོ་མོ་དགོན་པ།
kan su'u ཀན་སུའུ།
kan lho ཀན་ལྷོ།
kar mye ཀར་མྱེ། (CT)
ke'u ཀེའུ།
kha btags ཁ་བཏགས།
kho tshe ཁོ་ཚེ།
khon rgyal ཁོན་རྒྱལ།
khri ka ཁྲི་ཀ
khro mo ཁྲོ་མོ།
khrus chu ཁྲུས་ཆུ།
klu ཀླུ
klu dbang rgyal bo ཀླུ་དབང་རྒྱལ་བོ།
klu mo ཀླུ་མོ།
klu mo rgyal ཀླུ་མོ་རྒྱལ།
klu mo tshe ring ཀླུ་མོ་ཚེ་རིང་།
klu rig ཀླུ་རིག
klu thebs ཀླུ་ཐེབས།
klu b+he ཀླུ་སྦྱི།
kong bu ཀོང་བུ།
lab rtse ལབ་རྩེ།
lag ljibs ལག་ལྗིབས།
la mo bde chen ལ་མོ་བདེ་ཆེན།
la mo gser khri chos kyi blo gros ལ་མོ་གསེར་ཁྲི་ཆོས་ཀྱི་བློ་གྲོས།
la mo zhabs drung dkar po blo bzang bstan 'dzin chos kyi rgyal mtshan ལ་མོ་ཞབས་དྲུང་དཀར་པོ་བློ་ བཟང་བསྟན་འཛིན་ཆོས་ཀྱི་རྒྱལ་མཚན།
lan chags ལན་ཆགས།
lha ba ལྷ་བ།
lha mo mtsho ལྷ་མོ་མཚོ།
lha mo rgyal ལྷ་མོ་རྒྱལ།

lha mtsho ལྷ་མཚོ།
lha rgyal lo ལྷ་རྒྱལ་ལོ།
lha sa ལྷ་ས།
lha sgron ལྷ་སྒྲོན།
lha sgron rgyal ལྷ་སྒྲོན་རྒྱལ།
lha skyid rgyal ལྷ་སྐྱིད་རྒྱལ།
lo rgyal ལོ་རྒྱལ།
lo sar ལོ་སར།
ma Ni མ་ཉི།
mal gro gung dkar མལ་གྲོ་གུང་དཀར།
mang ra མང་ར།
mchod kong མཆོད་ཀོང་།
mchod mar མཆོད་མར།
mchod me མཆོད་མེ།
mchod pa མཆོད་པ།
me btsa' མེ་བཙའ།
mgo log མགོ་ལོག
mgo mang མགོ་མང་།
mgron mgo མགྲོན་མགོ།
mi dmangs gung hre མི་དམངས་གུང་ཧྲེ།
mi 'khrugs pa མི་འཁྲུགས་པ།
mkha' 'gro མཁའ་འགྲོ།
mkha' 'gro skyid མཁའ་འགྲོ་སྐྱིད།
mkha' yag 'bum མཁའ་ཡག་འབུམ།
mkhar mo མཁར་མོ།
mkhar rgyal མཁར་རྒྱལ།
mkhris ba མཁྲིས་པ།
mngal མངལ།
mo ba མོ་བ།
mo khyim མོ་ཁྱིམ།
mtshan thub མཚན་ཐུབ།
mtsho lho མཚོ་ལྷོ།
mtsho skyid མཚོ་སྐྱིད།
mtsho sngon མཚོ་སྔོན།
nag chu ནག་ཆུ།
nangchakja/snying lcags rgyal སྙིང་ལྕགས་རྒྱལ།
Naga, klu ཀླུ།

Nagaraja, klu dbang ryal bo ཀླུ་དབང་རྒྱལ་པོ།
nga brgyad lo'i zing 'khrug ང་བརྒྱད་ལོའི་ཟིང་འཁྲུག
oM ma Ni pad+me hUM ཨོཾ་མ་ཎི་པདྨེ་ཧཱུྃ།
Padmasambhava, ao rgyan rin po che ཨོ་རྒྱན་རིན་པོ་ཆེ།
phag mo nor bu ཕག་མོ་ནོར་བུ།
pho khyim ཕོ་ཁྱིམ།
rdo rje རྡོ་རྗེ།
rdo rje dpal 'byor རྡོ་རྗེ་དཔལ་འབྱོར།
rdo rje gcod pa རྡོ་རྗེ་གཅོད་པ།
rdo sbis རྡོ་སྦིས།
rgya mtsho རྒྱ་མཚོ།
rgyal ba mi 'khrugs pa རྒྱལ་བ་མི་འཁྲུགས་པ།
rgyal dpar རྒྱལ་དཔར།
rgyal bo རྒྱལ་པོ།
rgyu sha རྒྱུ་ཤ
rje btsun sgrol ma རྗེ་བཙུན་སྒྲོལ་མ།
rje tsong kha ba རྗེ་ཙོང་ཁ་བ།
rlung རླུང་།
rlung tshabs རླུང་ཚབས།
rma chu རྨ་ཆུ།
rma lho རྨ་ལྷོ།
rmu thag རྨུ་ཐག
rnam 'bu རྣམ་འབུ།
rta mgrin རྟ་མགྲིན།
rtsam pa རྩམ་པ།
ru khag རུ་ཁག
sa dmar ས་དམར།
sa paN kun dga' rgyal mtshan ས་པཎ་ཀུན་དགའ་རྒྱལ་མཚན།
Samsara, 'khor ba འཁོར་བ།
Sangha, dge 'dun དགེ་འདུན།
sbal ba སྦལ་བ།
sder kha སྡེར་ཁ།
sdong ras སྡོང་རས།
sdong rtswa སྡོང་རྩྭ།
se 'bru སེ་འབྲུ།
sems bde སེམས་བདེ།
sgo ra སྒོ་ར།

sgog chu སྒོག་ཆུ།
sgrol dkar སྒྲོལ་དཀར།
sgrol mtsho སྒྲོལ་མཚོ།
sgron mtsho སྒྲོན་མཚོ།
skal bzang tshe brtan སྐལ་བཟང་ཚེ་བརྟན།
skam khab སྐམ་ཁབ།
sked pa སྐེད་པ།
sku 'bum སྐུ་འབུམ།
sku 'bum byams pa gling སྐུ་འབུམ་བྱམས་པ་གླིང་།
sku dpar སྐུ་དཔར།
skyabs 'gro སྐྱབས་འགྲོ
skyabs su 'gro ba སྐྱབས་སུ་འགྲོ་བ།
skye ba dman སྐྱེ་བ་དམན།
skyid dung སྐྱིད་དུང་།
slob dpon rin po che སློབ་དཔོན་རིན་པོ་ཆེ།
smar gdan སྨར་གདན།
smyung gnas chog brgyad སྨྱུང་གནས་ཆོག་བརྒྱད།
sngags pa སྔགས་པ།
snum སྣུམ།
snyan shal སྙན་ཤལ།
srog blu སྲོག་ཤིན།
srung 'khor སྲུང་འཁོར།
srung rtags སྲུང་རྟགས།
stong skor སྟོང་སྐོར།
Tara, sgrol ma སྒྲོལ་མ།
tha khug ཐ་ཁུག
thab ka ཐབ་ཀ།
thang dkar ma ཐང་དཀར་མ།
thar mdo ཐར་མདོ།
thod dkar ཐོད་དཀར།
tho le ཐོ་ལེ།
tho le dgon rnam rgyal phun tshogs chos rdzong gling
ཐོ་ལེ་དགོན་རྣམ་རྒྱལ་ཕུན་ཚོགས་ཆོས་རྫོང་གླིང་།
thor thug ཐོར་ཐུག
thud ཐུད།
thugs rje chen po ཐུགས་རྗེ་ཆེན་པོ།
ting pra ཏིང་ཟླ།

Tri Songdetsen, khri srong lde btsan ཁྲི་སྲོང་ལྡེ་བཙན།
tsha gsur ཚ་གསུར།
tshal rnga ཚལ་རྔ།
tshang ra ཚང་ར།
tshe 'bar ཚེ་འབར།
tshe blu ཚེ་ཐུལ།
tshe b+he ཚེ་ཕེ།
tshe chang ཚེ་ཆང་།
tshe dbang ཚེ་དབང་།
tshe dpag med ཚེ་དཔག་མེད།
tshe gzungs skyid ཚེ་གཟུངས་སྐྱིད།
tshe lha rnam gsum ཚེ་ལྷ་རྣམ་གསུམ།
tshe sgrub ril bu ཚེ་སྒྲུབ་རིལ་བུ།
tshe thar ཚེ་ཐར།
tsho ba ཚོ་བ།
tshod ma ཚོད་མ།
tshogs ཚོགས།
tsong kha ཙོང་ཁ།
yul lha ཡུལ་ལྷ།
yul lha thar ཡུལ་ལྷ་ཐར།
Vajra Cutter, rdo rje gcod pa རྡོ་རྗེ་གཅོད་པ།
za ma dka ngal gyi dus ཟ་མ་དཀའ་ངལ་གྱི་དུས།
zha nye skor ba ཞ་ཉེ་སྐོར་བ།
zhing sa sger la bgo ba ཞིང་ས་སྐེར་ལ་བགོ་བ།
zhun ཞུན།
zi khron ཟི་ཁྲོན།
zi ling ཟི་ལིང་།
zla mtshan ཟླ་མཚན།
zla mtshan chad pa ཟླ་མཚན་ཆད་པ།
zog lug sger la bgo ba རྩོག་ལུག་སྐེར་ལ་བགོ་བ།
zwa khyig ཟྭ་ཁྱིག

CHINESE TERMS

Baochandaohu 包产到户
Caojiabao 曹家堡
Chengdu 成都
dui 队
Duojihuanjiao 多吉环角
Gannan 甘南
Gansu 甘肃
gongfen 工分
Gonghe 共和
Guide 贵德
Guinan 贵南
Guoluo 果洛
Guomaying 过马营
Hainan 海南
Haidong 海东
Honghua 红花
Hualong 化隆
Huangnan 黄南
Huangzhong 湟中
Hui 回
jiao 角
jiezha 结扎
liangshui 粮税
Longyang 龙羊
Longyangxia 龙羊峡
Mozhugongka 墨竹工卡
mu 亩
Naqu 那曲
Ningxia 宁夏
Ping'an 平安
Qiabuqia 恰卜恰
Qinghai 青海
Qurang 曲让
renmin gongshe 人民公社
Salar, Sala 撒拉
Shaanxi 陕西
Shagou 沙沟
Sichuan 四川
Tanggemu 塘格木
Tangseng 唐僧
Wangshenke 汪什科
Wenchangjia 文昌加
Xi'an 西安
Xianyang 咸阳
Xiahe 夏河
Xining 西宁
Xizang 西藏
Xunhua 循化
yang 阳
yin 阴
youpomian 油泼面
yuan 元